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Associate Commissioner, Community Based Alternatives
Division of Youth and Family Justice

Testimony to the New York City Council
General Welfare and Youth Services Committees
December 14, 2023

Oversight: Preventive Services for At-Risk and Justice Involved Youth

Good afternoon. My name is Raymond Toomer, and I am the Associate Commissioner for Community Based Alternatives (or CBA) in the Division of Youth and Family Justice (DYFJ) at the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). I am joined today by Stephanie Gendell, Deputy Commissioner for External Affairs and Johan Peguero, Associate Commissioner for Close to Home, as well as my colleagues from the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). We would like to thank Deputy Speaker Ayala and Chair Stevens, along with the members of the General Welfare and Youth Services Committees for holding today's hearing on preventive services for at-risk and justice involved youth.

At ACS, both in our child welfare and our youth justice work, we are intently focused on providing youth and their families with services and supports as far upstream as possible, so as to prevent as many youth as possible from coming into contact with the foster care, juvenile justice or justice systems.

ACS contracts with 44 prevention providers across the city to provide a full continuum of child welfare prevention services focused on addressing the needs of the whole family. Through these programs, we are reaching nearly 8,000 youth ages 13-18 years old in evidence-based models and family support services. ACS is also in the midst of a three-year citywide expansion of Family Enrichment Centers (FECs), going from 3 demonstration sites to 30 FECs. FECs are welcoming, home-like community spaces where neighbors connect, contribute to their community, find resources, and support one another. Currently, non-profit providers operate 12 Centers throughout the boroughs, with 8 more slated to open in 2024.

Our testimony today will focus on the continuum of prevention, aftercare and community-based services ACS provides for youth through the DYFJ continuum. Specifically, this includes the Family Assessment Program (FAP), the Juvenile Justice Initiative (JJI), Alternative-to-Detention (ATD) programs, and Close to Home aftercare, including our expansion of Fair Futures coaches and work with the Mayor's Gun Violence Prevention Task Force.

In all of these programs we are working to engage and support youth and their families whenever youth are struggling or at risk, so as to help youth reach their fullest potential and avoid the negative consequences associated with the justice system.

Family Assessment Program (FAP)

Since 2002, FAP has provided services to families seeking a PINS (Person in Need of Supervision) petition for youth up to age 18 who commit offenses that may not rise to the level of a crime, but are unique to their status as juveniles, including truancy and running away from home. PINS placements have declined significantly since the inception of FAP (from 822 PINS placements in 2002 to 16 in 2022 and 6 in the first 9 months of 2023).

As the number of caretakers seeking PINS has declined, FAP has made our offices and services available to any family struggling with difficult teenage behaviors. In 2022, FAP served 2,615 families citywide.

FAP bridges the gap between teenagers and families in crisis by partnering with them to resolve and manage conflict through assessments, individualized interventions, and referral to a range of community-based services and support programs, including

our own continuum of services. FAP is a voluntary program that seeks to keep youth on the right track and at home with their families. It is available to any family in NYC who is struggling with their youth's behavior.

Families typically seek help from FAP if a child is skipping school or having difficulties with teachers or classes; running away from home; using drugs or alcohol; struggling with mental illness; experiencing family conflicts or exhibiting defiant or dangerous behavior. While families can reach out to FAP directly, in 2022, 35% of families were referred from NYC Public Schools and 12% were referred by the NYPD.

In 2023, FAP also became the differential response program for families impacted by the Raising the Lower Age (RTLTA) legislation that raised the age of criminal responsibility up from 7 to 12. Now, youth 7-11 who commit an act that they may have been arrested for in the past, can be referred to FAP for intake and assessment. FAP will meet with the family, assess what is happening with the youth and, if the families want, FAP will make targeted referrals for on-going services.

Through our offices located in or near the family courthouses in every borough, families in need can receive an assessment from a trained and licensed social worker who will make tailored referrals ranging from community-based supports to ACS-funded intensive, therapeutic Evidence Based Programs that provide in-home crisis mediation and family therapy.

Our continuum includes:

- Family Stabilization, an intensive 3-month crisis intervention aimed at de-escalating conflicts and creating collaborative service plans;

- Functional Family Therapy (FFT), a family therapy intervention for the treatment of violent, criminal, behavioral, school, and conduct problems with youth and their families where both intra-familial and extra-familial factors are addressed;
- Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT), a family intervention for children and youth with serious behavior problems and/or drug use, which identifies patterns of family interaction and improves them to restore effective parental leadership and involvement with the youth.
- Multi-Systemic Therapy- Substance Abuse, an intensive evidence-based therapeutic intervention that provides therapy to the entire family in the home over a period of four months. Therapists visit the home multiple times per week and are available by phone 24 hours a day;
- Respite where youth enrolled in FAP, Alternative to Detention programs, Alternative to Placement programs and Close to Home Aftercare are able to be in a respite for 21 days, relieving parents of the care of their child when families need immediate relief in order to maintain or restore family functioning.
- Mentoring and Advocacy (MAAP) (and Fair Futures), which provides individualized, strength and advocacy based wraparound support services for up to 6 months. MAAP youth who require longer-term support can choose to be connected to a Fair Futures coach so they can continue to work on their educational and career goals well beyond the MAAP mentoring period of 6 months.

Juvenile Justice Initiative (JJI)

JJI is an alternative-to-placement program, aimed at diverting young people who have been found by the Family Court as Juvenile Delinquents from placement in a Close to Home residence. Instead of placement in a group home, youth in JJI are able to stay at home and receive intensive evidence-based interventions (MST or FFT) and services in the community, while being supervised by the NYC Department of Probation. The therapy engages the entire family and targets a range of issues, including mental health, substance abuse, peer difficulties, school-related challenges, and family troubles.

Specifically, families agree to engage in mandatory JJI services as a condition of probation and we begin working with the families within 48 hours of the court's dispositional hearing. Often the therapist from our provider agency attends the disposition so that the intake paperwork for services is completed at court immediately after the hearing. Youth are assigned probation officers who are familiar with JJI. The youth's MST or FFT therapist and the probation officer conference weekly, participate in case reviews and court hearings, and work collaboratively to address any issues that arise.

JJI serves approximately 200 youth annually. Therapy duration is typically 6 months, but can be extended to one year if clinically warranted. Despite serving a population with increasingly high-needs, JJI program completion rates have held steady at 65%.

Alternative to Detention (ATD) Program

After issuing a new RFP last year, ACS assumed responsibility for the Family Court ATD programs in July 2023. Managing the JJI ATP post-disposition program, NYC's Detention facilities and the Close to Home placement program provides us with a unique perspective into the needs of the youth in the juvenile justice system, making it a natural transition for ACS to manage the ATD pre-trial Family Court program.

The ATD providers, CASES, Good Shepherd Services and the Center for Justice Innovation, promote positive behaviors, healthy relationships, and problem-solving skills that will allow youth to remain safely in the community in lieu of detention. The model includes curfew checks and individualized supervision and services during the pendency of the JD case in an effort to reduce failure to appear warrants and rearrest. In addition, youth are connected to age-appropriate and accessible vocational, educational and social programming that is tailored to their specific needs.

With the new contracts and move to ACS, there are now ATD Court Liaison staff in Family Court to advocate for ATD programs when appropriate; a renewed focus on Youth Wellbeing as ATD Service Navigator staff connect youth to services based on individual needs during their time in the ATD program and beyond; and as a way to incentivize participation youth have the opportunity to earn a stipend of up to \$1000 for successful participation.

The target population is youth between the ages of 12 and 18 who score "mid" risk on the Detention Risk Assessment Instrument. We anticipate serving approximately 300 youth annually.

Aftercare Services

Despite all of the prevention efforts underway at ACS and other city agencies, there are unfortunately still youth for whom courts detain or place them.

Judges determine whether youth will be in detention while their cases are pending in court. Only youth with cases pending in Family Court can be detained in nonsecure detention, and any youth detained by a judge in Supreme Court would be in secure detention. At this time, 96% of youth in secure detention have cases in Supreme Court.

For the limited number of youth leaving secure detention and returning directly to the community, New York City Public Schools connects youth back to their schools; Bellevue which provides the mental health services in detention connects youth to mental health services in the community, and our case managers connect youth and their families to other services in the community.

For youth returning to the community from nonsecure detention, our nonprofit partners providing nonsecure detention are responsible for connecting youth to any supports or services they need in the community.

If a Family Court Judge decides to place a youth at disposition, the youth would be placed in a Close to Home facility. Close to Home placements are small, group-home like settings located in New York City and Westchester, where youth receive services and supports to help them address underlying needs and issues and then successfully return to the community.

All youth in Close to Home placements can receive up to 6 months of aftercare (and most youth are ordered to participate in aftercare for several months.) These

services aim to create a smooth transition from residential care to the community and can include education and vocation support; mental health and substance abuse services; case management and support services; referrals to community based programs; and a Fair Futures coach.

Fair Futures and the Mayor's Blueprint for Community Safety

This past summer, Mayor Adams, along with the New York City Gun Violence Prevention Task Force released a Blueprint focused on upstream solutions to address gun violence throughout the City. The recommendations focused on prevention and intervention strategies, through a public health and community development lens, to address the root causes of gun violence.

ACS appreciates all of the work of the Task Force and all of the agencies and entities working to implement the recommendations. We know that these types of early interventions are the best way to keep communities safe while promoting the well-being of youth and ultimately keeping youth and young people out of our detention facilities.

ACS's expansion of Fair Futures coaching for youth in our juvenile justice continuum is an important initiative in the Blueprint. In April 2023, ACS rolled out the Fair Futures model after working with the Center for Fair Futures to adapt the model to youth in Close to Home placements, Close to Home Aftercare and FAP. Youth in these programs now have access to coaches who can work with them until age 23, providing them with support and guidance so that when they are home in the community their lives stay on the right track.

Conclusion

Before concluding my testimony, I would like to take a moment to thank my colleagues at DYCD for their ongoing collaboration and partnership. Hundreds of youth in our foster care and juvenile justice programs participate in DYCD's continuum of after-school and youth employment programs, which are invaluable for the young people we serve.

I also want to thank all of the non-profit providers working with our DYFJ continuum and the DYFJ team for all that they do every day working with young people and their families, and continuously focusing on how we can best help youth achieve their fullest potential.

Finally, I want to thank the Council for your interest in the services and supports that can help prevent youth from coming into contact with the juvenile justice system, and for your commitment to the youth and families working with ACS and our providers.



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

**STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES ON GENERAL WELFARE
AND YOUTH SERVICES
DECEMBER 14, 2023**

Good afternoon,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chairs Ayala and Stevens and the members of the Committees on General Welfare and Youth Services for holding this hearing.

In 2017, New York State passed legislation to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 18, meaning that youth who come into contact with the criminal legal system should receive intervention, treatment, and services, not jail time. Our city also recognizes the developmental differences between young and emerging adults and those who are older, housing 18-21-year-olds separately and providing them with access to educational and other age-targeted programming. Like overall crime rates, arrests of youth have been decreasing over the past decade,¹ and New York City has invested in and expanded the continuum of services for youth who are justice-involved or at risk of justice involvement. There is, however, more work to be done.

Justice involvement for youth is linked to many negative social, economic, and behavioral outcomes. Youth involved with the criminal legal system are more likely to drop out of school and more likely to be unemployed or to struggle to find or maintain employment.^{2,3,4,5} Any court involvement, but especially incarceration, is traumatic for youth, and we have seen recently in our own city's overcrowded youth detention centers young people isolated without access to educational programming.⁶

We must prioritize preventing youth from coming into contact with the criminal legal system in the first place, and that often starts at school. Harsh and exclusionary school discipline, including suspension, expulsion, and in-school arrests, can directly funnel children—disproportionately Black and Brown students and students with disabilities—into the criminal legal system, often

¹ <https://cccnewyork.org/unpacking-the-state-of-youth-justice-in-ny/>

² https://www.agency.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/School-to-prison-pipeline-report_final.pdf

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5183606/>

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<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/how-to-improve-employment-outcomes-for-young-adults-leaving-incarceration/#:~:text=Of%20all%20surveyed%20young%20adults,%2C%20and%20mixed%20Drace%20reentrants.>

⁵ https://www.nyc.gov/assets/opportunity/pdf/evidence/considerations_final_2019.pdf

⁶

<https://gothamist.com/news/teens-in-nyc-detention-centers-are-sleeping-on-the-ground-due-to-overcrowding-staff-say>

for behavior that is not criminal, like having an emotional crisis. This means that vulnerable students continue to drop out of school at increased rates, and students who are suspended even once earn less over their lifetimes, have higher rates of contact with the criminal legal system, and are at increased risk for deportation, depression, and suicide. Limiting the use of exclusionary discipline is long overdue, and I urge the New York State Legislature to pass the The Judith Kaye Solutions Not Suspensions Act.

Justice-involved youth often have multiple needs, including educational, mental health, and housing support. New York City schools are the largest provider of mental health services, but many youth need more support than schools can provide, and there is often a long wait to access services. Students with disabilities are often criminalized for behavior that is a symptom of their disability, often in response to a school's inability or unwillingness to meet a student's needs. Too many young people in our city, particularly LGBTQ+ youth, experience homelessness and housing insecurity, which leads to contact with police. Far too many young people come into contact with the criminal legal system because of social, emotional, physical, housing, and health needs that are not being met, and the city must invest in robust, cross-agency and cross-sector services to fill these gaps.

Lastly, I want to highlight some youth violence prevention programs in our city. Mayor Adams recently expanded Project PIVOT, a partnership between NYC Public Schools and community-based organizations that provide mentorship, counseling, and violence interruption programs.⁷ Non-profit organizations like the Center for Justice Innovation and Good Shepherd Services also provide robust anti-violence programs for young people. I am concerned, however, about the longevity of these programs in the face of mounting city budget cuts. For example, NextSTEPS, a mentoring program serving young people living in NYCHA housing, was cut abruptly this summer, leaving program participants suddenly without access to programming.

Young people are the future of our city, and I urge the administration to invest in, not cut, vital programming and services that uplift and empower our youth and communities.

Thank you.

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<https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2022/10/6/23391524/nyc-schools-project-pivot-violence-interrupters-mentorship/>

CARNEGIE HALL

New York City Council Fiscal Year 2024

December 14, 2023

**Committee on Youth Services and Committee on General Welfare
Oversight – Preventative Services for At-Risk and Justice Involved Youth**

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens, Chair Ayala, and Members of the Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare. My name is David Freudenthal, and I am the Director of Government Relations at Carnegie Hall. Thank you for the opportunity to testify about our work with young people involved in the juvenile justice system.

Since 2010, Carnegie Hall's **Future Music Project** provides 150-200 New York City teens and young adults (ages 14-21) involved in the justice system with opportunities to create, perform, and produce their own original music per year. In partnership with the Administration for Children's Services, young people in secure and non-secure detention and congregate care settings at Belmont, Bronx Hope, Crossroads Juvenile Center in Brownsville, and Horizon Juvenile Center in Mott Haven create and learn about music through Future Music Project instruction, curriculum, and videos led by teaching artists. Workshops for young people in the justice system include songwriting, digital music production, and fundamental musicianship skills. Young people will also have the opportunity to participate in monthly listening parties, featuring guest artists chosen by participants and exploring a new genre of music each month.

This year, Carnegie Hall is expanding the program to increase the number and frequency of workshops offered in secure detention, as well as implementing a series of music and mental health workshops for young people and staff each led by a mental health expert (e.g. a culturally responsive child psychologist or family therapist). This expansion includes incorporating men who, while incarcerated at Sing Sing Correctional Facility, participated in Carnegie Hall's Musical Connections program and have since returned home as teaching artists and credible mentors for youth in secure detention. Their personal experience of the justice system, which creates enormous barriers to self-expression and disproportionately harms people of color, gives them deep insight into the challenges these youth are facing. As members of the Musical Connections Advisory Committee, they will co-facilitate workshops with teaching artists and support young people, specifically young men that have been sentenced to adult facilities once they turn 21, in secure detention workshops, acting as credible messengers on the power of music as a tool for self-expression. This mentorship is especially meaningful for youth who are transitioning to adult facilities when they reach the legal age of majority.

In response to the changing justice landscape and the needs of young people and staff in secure detention facilities, **Carnegie Hall seeks to prioritize the mental health of the entire network of young people, staff, families, and teaching artists by building a different type of community through an infusion of music, joy, creative expression, humanity, and togetherness.**

On January 31, 2024, we will hold a Winter Celebration for young people to share their works-in-progress with an audience of ACS staff, family members, and peers. This is the first time since 2020 that we are bringing together young people in-person at Carnegie Hall, and we look forward to celebrating their music and creativity."

Program Goals Future Music Project offerings in secure and non-secure detention and placement are curated to be specifically responsive to the needs and goals for young people and staff in each setting. These goals include:

- Provide youth with resources and tools to produce, create and perform their own music.
- Use music as a tool to build community.
- Facilitate workshops with music industry professionals to introduce young people to the ins and outs of the business side of the music industry at non-secure detention facilities.
- Invite youth in non-secure detention to attend select concerts at Carnegie Hall where they can enjoy a backstage tour before the concert and participate in an artist meet & greet after the performance.
- Train teaching artists to work in the juvenile justice setting with youth ages 14-21.

Program Outcomes Through songwriting and composition projects, youth and adults in the justice system build a positive sense of self and strengthen bonds to family and community through their participation in Future Music Project. A 2013 meta-analysis, for example, found that participation in any education programming in correctional facilities reduced the odds of recidivism by 43 percent and increased the likelihood of post-incarceration employment by 13 percent. Studies have also shown that overall participants report an increased sense of personal agency, better management of time and personal resources, and increased emotional and social self-control.

One Future Music Project participant from Bronx Hope shared: *"During one workshop, the way we were able to take our pain and put it into a song that sounds fire was good. That helps you. It's a good coping skill, some people get mad and frustrated and then go do something they're not supposed to, and this is a way to express yourself without getting in trouble. This might take you somewhere."*

This work is made possible by consistent public support of arts and culture.

A commitment to funding the arts and culture is a compound investment in economic resiliency and growth, workforce development, community healing, education, and public safety. Sustained investment in the arts and culture is a statement to each and every person who calls New York City home that their holistic wellness matters. I join my colleagues in the Cultural Institutions Group, and the entire cultural sector, and ask that DCLA be spared from the next two rounds of the Administration's PEG cuts so that we can continue to serve all New Yorkers.

Our city's cultural organizations are community anchors for employment, commerce, and social connection. We are the lodestar of our city's economic revitalization and continued growth. We are essential human services providers with our partners in government. Our ranks include some of the most vital cultural, science, and

artistic institutions in the world. Our organizations are the core of the cultural economy that makes NY the greatest city in the world.

Programs like these continue to be critical components of the city's strategy to meet people directly, effectively, and safely where they are. The Council's continued investment in these partnerships is absolutely critical to ensure that these essential services for our city's youth and families continue. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you individually to discuss Carnegie Hall's programming partnerships in your district.

Programming and services provided by nonprofit organizations have already been reduced as a result of the cuts announced in November. The additional 5% planned cuts in January would be detrimental to the continued running of these community programs. Organizations like Carnegie Hall touch every vital aspect of daily life - from public education, health and human services, cultural enrichment to language access. We call on the City to partner with the nonprofit sector and work toward creative solutions - not hinder us further. The City cannot withstand a 15% cut to its budget, and any additional cuts to the nonprofit sector will only undermine the public safety, health, and cleanliness of New York City.

We thank the Committees for their interest and investment in these programs, and we encourage the Council to continue to support this important work and other programs by our cultural colleagues across the city. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and thanks to our community partners, artists, educators, and community members for being a part of truly transformational changes.



**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES,
JOINTLY WITH
THE COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE**

**OVERSIGHT HEARING:
PREVENTIVE SERVICES FOR AT-RISK AND JUSTICE INVOLVED YOUTH**

**TESTIMONY BY: JASON GORDON, SUPERVISOR OF YOUTH WORKERS
PROGRAM: ASSERTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SUCCESS (ACES)**

**ORGANIZATION:
CENTER FOR ALTERNATIVE SENTENCING AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES (CASES)**

CONTACT: Loyal Miles, lmiles@cases.org, 646-285-8775

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens and members of the Committee on Youth Services. Good afternoon, Deputy Speaker Ayala and members of the Committee on General Welfare. My name is Jason Gordon. I'm a Supervisor of Youth Workers in the **Assertive Community Engagement & Success program—the ACES program**—operated by CASES, the Center for Alternative Sentencing & Employment Services.

ACES serves young people living in East Harlem and the South Bronx with two goals: prevent violence and save young people's lives. We work with young men ages 16-24. Nearly all are Black or Latino and are out of school and unemployed. Most have prior arrests and are caught up in cycles of violence in the community. ACES may be the last chance as they enter adulthood to step away from a path heading toward prison or death.

Let me be clear because I know that when some people hear CASES they think of court-mandated alternatives to incarceration. **ACES is not court-mandated. Participation in the program is completely voluntary.** We take referrals from community members and social service providers along with from the criminal legal system. **Two of our largest referral sources are the NYPD and the young people already in the program**—if both police and the young people we serve believe in us, we must be doing something right.

Jose's Story

I'd like to tell you about Jose. Like many of the young people referred to ACES, when we began initial outreach, Jose dodged his assigned Youth Worker for months. It took four months of reaching out before he finally agreed to a full conversation with the team. Jose was gang involved, was about to become a first-time father, and needed a job. His ACES Youth Worker helped him to get his birth certificate, social security card, and ID so he could work. Eventually, he enrolled in the ACES Work Crew, where he could earn a wage while learning what he needed

to be job ready. Jose eventually got a full-time job with Amazon. Now he moves safely around his community making deliveries and earning money to support his family. Jose continues to be connected with the program, stopping by to check in with Youth Workers and to chat with participants who are still in early phase of ACES, talking with them about how the program can help them stay safe and reach their potential.

The ACES approach comes from Roca, a nationally recognized youth violence prevention program that was developed with public health experts at Massachusetts General Hospital and the Harvard Medical School. I recently earned a Master's in Social Work from Columbia, and let me tell you the Roca approach works, and it works in part because it was designed to be delivered by people like me, and I don't mean social workers, I mean people who grew up in the streets, who have our own experiences of incarceration, and who are committed to helping young people in our communities to have a real chance at a better life.

Earlier this fall, I watched as successful CASES youth programs were closed suddenly and without warning due to City budget cuts in the Department of Probation. ACES is funded by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. The program costs \$2 million a year. MOCJ has been a good partner for our program, but it's December and **ACES has no contract and no assurance of funding beyond this coming June.**

The City's investment in ACES makes it possible for our team to work with young people for up to four years, because that's what it takes. The story I shared about Jose, that doesn't happen in a six-month or even a one-year program.

Currently, ACES is working with 110 young people in East Harlem and the South Bronx. We work to see every one of them in-person in the community at least three times a week. Over the past three years, the ACES team has engaged our young people in more than 3,400 program sessions. Our Work Crew has separately supported young people to complete more than 1,500 hours of transitional employment. Of those young people in ACES who had an open court case, 85% have successfully fulfilled all their court requirements.

Every day, rain, snow, or shine, in fact right now as we're sitting here, the ACES team is out in the streets working with young people. I want to invite you to come out and see for yourself. ACES is something the City should be celebrating, an investment that is working to prevent violence, save lives, and make better futures possible for some of our most vulnerable and most promising young people.

ACES is a program operated by CASES, a nationally recognized leader in the development of innovative programs to support people who have become caught up in the criminal legal system. We specialize in serving youth and young adults and people who are living with serious mental illness. CASES programs serve more than 9,000 New Yorkers annually, nearly 90% of whom are Black and/or Latino, consistent with racial disparities in policing and sentencing. Our programs

prevent the harm and trauma of incarceration through pretrial services and alternatives to incarceration (ATI); support the achievement of education, employment, health and housing goals; promote mental wellbeing through a range of clinical and peer support services; and improve community safety and well being through community-based, preventive solutions like the ACES program.

In addition to ACES, CASES' continuum of youth and young adult programs includes education, employment, family, mentoring, and therapeutic services. This fall, City budget cuts including within the NYC Department of Probation have had devastating impacts for direct service providers citywide, including the closure of two of CASES' mentoring programs for young people with criminal legal system (CLS) involvement. In light of these budget cuts and with the anticipation of further cuts, we are deeply concerned about the sustainability of life-saving youth services like ACES.

CANCELLATION OF IMPACT CONTRACT

As noted by Chair Stevens at this Oversight Hearing, media reports indicate that the number of youth detained inside detention facilities like Crossroads and Horizons has grown to a point that these facilities are now dangerously overcrowded. In 2022, through an RFP process of the Department of Probation (DOP), CASES was awarded a three-year contract to implement the **Intensive Mentoring/Parents and Children Together (IMPACT)** program. **IMPACT was to provide an alternative to placement program for young people in Family Court and the youth court parts in Criminal Supreme Court.** Unfortunately, we received notice at the end of September that the contract for IMPACT would be terminated within days in early October, before the Department of Probation ever allowed the CASES program team to start work on this contract. **There is now no alternative program for these young people**, many of whom will end up held in youth detention facilities that, as noted just above, are becoming increasingly and dangerously overcrowded—also likely at great expense to the City.

IMPACT would have provided a critical service to young people and their families. The program had a \$3.3 million annual operating budget and was intended to serve 175 youth and families annually across the five boroughs. The program's services were to include home-based family therapy by clinicians, credible messenger mentorship by community members with relevant lived experience trained in the above-noted evidence-based cognitive behavioral intervention (CBI) developed by Roca and public health experts, and help for young people to reach their educational, employment and pro-social goals.

As issued in the RFP, CASES' contract for IMPACT was intended to start on January 1, 2023. CASES hired staff and conducted outreach to community organizations, public defenders, district attorney's offices and judges to provide information about the IMPACT program and our intake process. We were prepared to launch this program for several months; however, DOP would not provide their sign-off to let the services start and also did not communicate what additional steps might have been needed to get the program off the ground. Throughout the nine months during which the IMPACT team was in place but DOP was not allowing services to

begin, referrals of young people from Court stakeholders were continuously made to the IMPACT team.

In May, DOP did briefly grant permission to CASES to start the IMPACT program, and our program team conducted an intake. However, before we were able to enroll this participant, DOP informed us that we needed to stop all work on this program, and that we would not be able to start the program until a program manager at DOP was hired. This was in July of 2023, seven months after we were prepared to start delivering program services.

Despite repeated outreach to DOP after this, we were never allowed to start providing IMPACT services, even as referrals continuously came in to our program team. On Monday, September 25, we received notice from DOP that the IMPACT contract was terminated with an effective date of October 9.

As noted above, there is no equivalent alternative to placement (ATP) program for court-involved teens—although DOP and ACS both operate other ATPs, these serve young people with different needs. Most lack the citywide scale of IMPACT. This program would have served 175 young people and families across the five boroughs. These young people are now highly likely to end up in juvenile detention facilities. Had IMPACT been allowed to operate, these young people would have the access to a robust program combining therapeutic and mentoring support for them and their families—in-home family therapy by clinicians was an explicit part of IMPACT services in addition to mobile mentoring by credible messengers. Instead, they will be forced out of their community into a less supportive and more expensive setting that is likely to contribute to recidivism. Since the program was terminated, we have continued to receive requests from community partners including City agency staff to send their clients to the IMPACT program, highlighting that urgent and recognized need for this type of service remains.

ADDITIONAL DETAIL ON ACES CONTRACT STATUS

Given proposed City budget cuts, the sudden cancellation of the IMPACT program earlier this fall highlights the vulnerability of critical youth services. The ACES program described above currently serves 110 young people, all of whom were referred including many by NYPD due to their vulnerability to cycles of violence in the community. These young people have made the voluntary choice—often after months of assertive outreach by ACES Youth Workers—to enroll in the program’s services and work toward meaningful and lasting behavioral change, including with the goal of safely extricating themselves from cycles of violence and supporting themselves and their families by securing employment with meaningful advancement potential.

As noted above, ACES implements a nationally recognized youth violence prevention model developed by the Roca organization and now used in several cities in Massachusetts and recently expanded to Baltimore. ACES’ evidence-based model emphasizes cognitive behavioral intervention (CBI) delivered by credible messengers, helps youth and families to address subsistence needs, centers on developing

interpersonal relationship and emotional regulation skills, utilizes peace circles with participants, promotes job-readiness and employment, and supports exit from the criminal legal system. The program is designed to last up to four years to help young people achieve meaningful, lasting life change.

As noted above, ACES is currently funded by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, which again has been a good partner to the program. However, ACES currently has no assurance of funding after June 30, 2024. We strongly urge the Council to support the sustaining of ACES and the program's life-saving services.

Courtney Bryan, Executive Director

**Center for Justice Innovation
New York City Council
Committee on Youth Services & Committee on General Welfare
December 14, 2023**

Good afternoon Deputy Speaker Ayala, Chair Stevens, and esteemed members of the General Welfare and Youth Committees. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Center for Justice Innovation to discuss the importance of preventative services for at-risk and justice-involved youth.

The Center for Justice Innovation works with justice systems and impacted communities to advance equity and build public safety through sustainable, community-driven solutions. Our in-house research informs the creation of novel programs that improve outcomes for victims, communities and those involved in the legal system. Our public safety work focuses on crime prevention, economic development, and providing communities with the necessary resources and support to advocate for programs that can expand opportunity and enhance safety.

Our programs and services are geared towards preventing initial or further contact with the legal system. In focusing on upstream solutions, ideally before individuals are even involved in the justice system, we are able to make significant impacts to public safety, addressing the factors that contribute to justice system involvement before harm occurs.

We are intentional in ensuring that our programs and services are available to support youth at every stage of the legal process, including before contact occurs. Preventative services for youth are of the utmost importance. Justice system involvement at any age, but particularly for young people, can have deleterious effects, requiring more serious interventions and additional resources to get back on the right path. Through prevention, we can avoid this further strain on our resources and enhance community safety by curtailing crime before it happens.

Children and young adults are still developing, figuring out who they are, and finding their place in the world. Because of this, it is essential that they have trusted peers and mentors to rely on to steer them in the right direction. Our programs offer safe spaces for youth to convene and be heard, where they can share their thoughts and concerns without judgment and receive advice from people who have walked in their footsteps. Our programs are hyperlocal and have deep roots in the community. Youth can be assured that many of the adults they encounter at our programs have grown up on the same blocks as them, went to the same schools, and maybe were even taught by the same teachers.

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Community safety programs are not one size fits all, but rather need to be tailored to neighborhood needs. We encourage youth to get involved in this process, developing and bringing to fruition their own innovative strategies for community safety. By investing in the people and places that have been under-resourced and impacted by the legal system, we are able to uplift those with less access to decision-making power to become crucial parts of our programs. Young people, particularly those most likely to experience criminalization and community violence, are often the primary leaders of our community violence prevention efforts.

Today, I will be focusing on four methods that have shown great success in helping to positively influence the lives of youth across our programming: gun violence prevention, restorative justice, placekeeping, and economic empowerment.

Gun Violence Prevention

Our programs work to create safer communities by preventing violence at all levels and responding when violence does occur. We engage those who have been most impacted by violence using multiple strategies including street outreach, conflict de-escalation by trained violence interrupters, mentoring, community organizing around gun violence prevention, and leadership opportunities for impacted youth. When violence happens, we respond by providing safe, meaningful opportunities for communal response and healing. We also work to prevent retaliatory action, putting a stop to the cycle of violence.

The Center's work is informed by an amazing group of researchers, many of whom have personal connections to participants' social networks. These relationships allow for higher levels of trust and honesty, rarely found in prior research. Our study of young gun-carriers in Brooklyn, New York, "Two Battlefields," identifies fear—fear of one's own death or the death of one's family members—as the overwhelming factor behind the decision to carry. In-depth interviews with 103 gun-carriers, ages 15 to 24, 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.

These experiences fostered an atmosphere of unpredictable violence, forcing many participants to become hypervigilant. For the majority, fear for their own lives (75 percent) or for their families (72 percent) was the primary reason for carrying a gun. Under constant threat—from other gun-carriers as well as from police—and with virtually no ties to the mainstream economy, participants describe gun-carrying as a form of resilience in a world with few options. Only a small fraction had access to stable work in the mainstream economy, with most relying on

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informal “hustles”—like drug dealing and scams—to make ends meet. The inherent dangers of the underground economy drove many participants to carry a gun for protection.¹

Research like this gives us insight into the root causes of gun violence, the factors our programs should be addressing to keep youth from getting involved. The Save Our Streets (S.O.S.) program works in four New York City neighborhoods, 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 control 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 supporting our “Stop Shooting. Start Living,” message and counting 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.

¹White, 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

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

Youth Programming: Our youth specific program, Youth Organizing to Save Our Streets (YO S.O.S.) mobilizes youth in a twice weekly after-school program. Participating youth become peer educators and advocates for change in the local schools and throughout the community. S.O.S. also carries out the following initiatives:

- **Working with Justice-Involved Youth:** S.O.S. Bronx is contracted through the city Administration for Children's Services to work with young people in Horizon Detention Center, The Children's Center, and the Close to Home program. The goal is to reduce violence by changing the mindsets of the youth we serve. Staff facilitate workshops, including Job Readiness, Know Your Rights (provided by Legal Aid), Self-Care and Awareness, Reflections of Oneself, and Creative Arts plus game and movie nights. If needed, staff will accompany participants to court and write recommendation letters to help support their cases.
- **Conflict Mediation in Schools:** School-based conflict mediation provides culturally competent programming to at-risk youth to reduce their involvement in violence while increasing attendance, academic progress, and other social measures. The program includes school-wide activities to change the culture around violence and to assist schools in their response to incidents in school or the community.
- **Anti-Gun Violence Employment Program:** This program is a seasonal employment program for participants 14- to 24-years-old. The program consists of two phases: a six-week summer program and a 25-week school-year program. Job responsibilities include

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community canvassing, asset mapping, data gathering, community outreach, and coordinating shooting responses.

- **In This Together:** Also known as “ITT,” this is a therapeutic program that fosters a safe space for individuals in the community and participants to share and process trauma experienced by themselves or someone close to them. Through individual and group therapy, participants learn coping skills and other techniques such as mindfulness to incorporate in their daily lives. Groups like the King and Queen Makers tap into the greatness of young people and teach them how to use their talents to be positive and safe.
- **Youth Council:** The Youth Council serves young people ages 16 to 24 by providing a safe space to develop leadership and community skills. Participants work to become positive contributors to their neighborhoods. Learning takes place through workshops, community meetings, and recreational activities. Goals include reducing violence and forming a healthy, vibrant peer culture.

S.O.S. Results

Our S.O.S. programs use data to develop strategies that work to identify neighborhood “hot spots” and the times and days of the week shootings occur. This allows our teams and resources to be focused most effectively to engage in those areas around specific times to reduce shootings. This strategy has resulted in reductions in gun violence in our target areas within Brooklyn and the Bronx.

Brooklyn: S.O.S. programs are located in the neighborhoods of Crown Heights and Bedford-Stuyvesant. An evaluation of the S.O.S. program in Crown Heights demonstrated that gun violence decreased six percent in the 77th Precinct (where S.O.S. operates) while increasing 20 percent in nearby precincts with similar demographics and crime rates. (Researchers concluded it was unlikely that the gun violence increase in nearby precincts was due to displacement of violence to surrounding areas.)

In 2018, S.O.S. outreach workers and violence interrupters de-escalated more than 106 violent conflicts, responded to 21 shootings, and forged over 200 peace agreements. There are up to 90 individuals enrolled in the S.O.S. program at any given time, with more than 80 percent of participants assessed as high risk for involvement in gun violence. Nearly 8,000 people attended

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more than 80 community events organized by S.O.S. Brooklyn designed to spread awareness and messages of peace and unity.²

The Bronx: S.O.S. Bronx operates programs in the South Bronx (Mott Haven) and Morrisania. An independent evaluation credited S.O.S. Bronx with reducing gun injuries by 37 percent when compared to a similar area not served by Cure Violence. The program has also reduced shooting victimizations by 63 percent.³

A report on our four Cure Violence sites found the presence of Cure Violence was associated with statistically significant reductions in violence-related norms, specifically the willingness of young men to use violence in conflict situations.⁴

Restorative Justice

Through our Restorative Justice program for young people, **Youth Impact**, we have engaged young people to become transformative leaders in their communities, addressing inequity and the factors that lead to youth involvement in the criminal legal system. Youth Impact provides restorative, peer-facilitated diversion programming. The goal is to build understanding, encourage accountability, and provide healing or repair relationships among youth, avoiding more punitive responses that can cause long-term harm and stigmatization. Grounded in restorative justice practices, Youth Impact utilizes a community-based approach. Many members have been directly impacted by the criminal legal system, reflecting Youth Impact's guiding philosophy that those who have been impacted are most able to lead, develop meaningful solutions, and engage their peers.

Each cohort is trained in restorative justice practices and holds community-building circles for referred participants. As paid interns, members lead diversion programs, develop and pilot projects to promote community change, and take actions to address the underlying issues causing youth contact with the criminal legal system. Youth Impact offers individual support, mentorship, and educational opportunities to support members as they move towards their individual goals. Programmatic offerings include:

² Center for Justice Innovation. (2022). "S.O.S. Brooklyn Fact Sheet". Unpublished internal document.

³ Center for Justice Innovation (2022, January). *A Guide to Safe and Equitable Communities*. New York, NY. https://www.innovatingjustice.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2022/Guide_SafeEquitableCommunities_01282022.pdf

⁴ Center for Justice Innovation. (2022). "S.O.S. Brooklyn Fact Sheet". Unpublished internal document.

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- **Youth-Led Diversion:** We offer a range of peer-led options that keep youth out of the justice system while helping them to take responsibility for their actions. The program receives referrals from the departments of probation and police, district attorneys, family and criminal courts, and schools. Diversion options include:
 - **Restorative circles:** Circles, which are facilitated by Youth Impact members, handle cases diverted from the traditional court system. In a circle, everyone has a chance to share their experiences. The referred youth talks about the incident, builds accountability, and then works with Youth Impact members to decide on steps to repair the harm and address underlying issues.
 - **Youth Court:** Youth Impact trains local teenagers to serve as jurors, judges, and advocates, who handle real-life cases involving their peers. Grounded in restorative justice principles, youth court uses positive peer pressure to ensure that young people who have committed minor offenses learn accountability and repair the harm caused by their actions. The program receives referrals from schools, the New York Police Department, the New York City Department of Probation, and the New York City Law Department.
- **Peer mentorship:** Youth Impact members are trained to be mentors and credible messengers, equipping them to facilitate community-building circles and workshops about decision-making, developing positive goals, and building support systems.
- **Neighborhood Youth Justice Council** provides a platform for youth to participate meaningfully in justice-related policy-making and problem-solving to address local challenges. Working collaboratively with community, justice, and law enforcement partners, council members identify and research issues, generate potential solutions, and work to implement positive change.
- **Youth Organizing, Research, Policy, and Advocacy:** Youth organizing initiatives activate members around issues important to youth. Interns develop community organizing and advocacy skills through hands-on development of campaigns and projects. Policy and advocacy opportunities create platforms for youth leaders to ensure their voices are included in conversations from which they are often left out. Members engage in research, policy development, and system change at all levels—from neighborhood to national.
- **Community Investment:** Youth work with community stakeholders to create solutions to neighborhood problems. Solutions emphasize healing as a way to address systemic harm and support safe neighborhoods. Responses developed include placekeeping

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initiatives (where stakeholders conceive and implement changes to public spaces), community circles, pop-up wellness and self-care spaces, and cultural events.

Placekeeping

For nearly 30 years, the Center for Justice Innovation has been exploring the relationship between community-imagined, designed, and utilized space; reduced levels of crime; and stronger, more vibrant neighborhoods. Placekeeping—the active care and maintenance of a place and its social fabric by the people who live and work there—is a structured, collaborative process that brings community residents together to reimagine and reinvent shared public spaces. By creating places that are welcoming, familiar, maneuverable, and conducive to economic development and social interaction, placekeeping can tip the scales in favor of safe and vibrant communities for youth to thrive in. These initiatives create invaluable opportunities for youth to impact their neighborhood by conceiving, designing, and implementing changes to public spaces to address the underlying causes of violence such as divestment and marginalization.

In partnership with community youth, we are able to transform neglected spaces, converting high-crime areas into places youth want to inhabit. These are physically, culturally, and socially relevant spaces that are conducive not just to positive social interactions but also economic development. Ultimately, youth who engage with our placekeeping work are left with a heightened sense of ownership, trust, investment, and comfort in their own communities.

Brownsville Community Justice Center's Belmont Revitalization Project

The Belmont Revitalization Project seeks to transform the distressed Belmont Avenue in Brownsville, Brooklyn, into a thriving business district that is welcoming to the community. The project launched with a day of service designed to engage youth, providing them with skills and leadership opportunities. Justice Center staff brought together more than 100 community members, the majority of whom were under the age of 24, and local businesses to spend the day picking up litter, removing graffiti, planting flowers and trees, and painting a mural near a local supermarket.⁵ The Belmont Revitalization project has produced an annual festival that draws 900

⁵ Center for Justice Innovation (2015, July). *The Belmont Revitalization Project: Reimagining an Avenue*. New York, NY. <https://www.innovatingjustice.org/articles/belmont-revitalization-project-reimagining-avenue>

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residents; a cutting-edge public plaza, and a youth-led tech program providing innovative lighting solutions to increase positive pedestrian traffic towards local businesses.⁶

Bronx Community Justice Center's Jackson Ave Project

The Jackson Ave project engaged young adults from the South Bronx to create a safer, more vibrant public space and promote social cohesion within a neighborhood corridor that is a community hub yet has also experienced high rates of violence and disinvestment. These young adults assessed the impacts of violence along the corridor and created community beautification, placekeeping and planned community activities to change the narrative of the area. Participants gained tangible skills and credentials as they improved neighborhood infrastructure and planned and executed large scale community events to create community connection and healing.

Workforce-Readiness

We understand that long-term community safety cannot be achieved without addressing poverty, inequality, and structural racism. Time and time again, we have witnessed the correlation between crime and violence and indicators of poverty, inequity, and divestment. The community districts with the highest rates of violent crime tend to be majority Black and Brown communities with low rates of employment, family income, home ownership, and educational attainment, demonstrating the long deep interconnection of crime, poverty, inequality, and systemic racism. Thus, an integral part of our safety approach for youth is supporting mobility out of poverty, providing young people with the education and job skills needed to find employment in growth industries. We offer a wide range of programming that supports this effort, including entrepreneurship training and workforce development programs.

Bronx Community Justice Center

The Bronx Community Justice Center works towards healing and redefinition of possibility for young people from the South Bronx through a range of opportunities, including leadership development and entrepreneurship. The neighborhood-centric program model is

⁶ Center for Justice Innovation (2022, January). *A Guide to Safe and Equitable Communities*. New York, NY. https://www.innovatingjustice.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2022/Guide_SafeEquitableCommunities_01282022.pdf

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rooted in creative social enterprise that builds hard and soft skills, provides paid internships, and creates employment pipelines.

- **Workforce Development:** The Justice Center offers a range of workforce development and work readiness programs including certification programs such as OSHA and security, drivers training programs, and community internship programs.
- **Community Internship Program:** The Justice Center provides supported opportunities for youth to gain work experience and receive mentorship from successful professionals, while investing in and supporting small locally-owned businesses.
- **Resurrect the Youth:** This is the Justice Center's youth-led brand and social enterprise. Young entrepreneurs complete training in all aspects of launching a business and get hands-on experience launching their own product lines that address youth-identified social issues. Members have taken on topics such as youth unemployment and youth mental health.
- **Youth Entrepreneurship:** This program provides participants with hands-on, project-based training to develop and launch a business. Participants gain skills to develop their side hustles into entrepreneurial ventures while also creating collective projects focused on community safety and healing.
- **Interest-based Programs:** The Justice Center offers a range of paid, interest-based, and project-based internships including boxing, music production, digital media and design, documentary, community benefits, and urban planning. Each internship culminates in the execution of a youth-led community-based event supporting community safety and healing.
- **Design Lab:** Working with a Bronx-based creative agency, Justice Center interns are trained in photography, videography, and graphic design. Interns develop and implement community improvement projects including art installations in local housing developments and placekeeping interventions, as well as digital and print projects.
- **High School Equivalency:** Onsite high school equivalency programming allows participants to study and obtain their high school equivalency. The programming is integrated with youth and workforce programs to increase engagement and success.

Neighbors in Action Youth Center

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The Youth Center uses an intersectional lens in organizing for social justice. Youth are trained in leadership, public speaking, facilitation, and collaborative problem solving and take part in civic education activities to inform their community mobilization and social action projects. Through programs such as Youth Impact, youth with limited experience in organizing can make connections between their lived experiences, their peer group's shared experiences, and larger systems which impact their communities.

Together, they develop presentations, community events, and interactive campaigns to promote alternatives to violence and pathways toward healing. Through a combination of experiential workshops and community organizing opportunities over the course of eight months, Youth Impact participants develop leadership skills including public speaking, creative problem solving, networking, event planning, resume writing, and campaign planning. Participants who successfully complete the program receive a stipend, community service credit, and assistance in securing paid summer employment or internship positions.

Arts, media, and technology are integrated across the Youth Center programming to amplify organizing efforts, healing justice initiatives, and participant mobility. In summer 2019, the Youth Center launched a multimedia arts lab to create pipelines to careers in the creative arts economy in Brooklyn. This program continues to grow, offering paid internships in music production and graphic design and open lab hours for young people to utilize the Center's resources as a creative coworking space.

The Youth Center also connects young adults with work-readiness opportunities through our Work PLUS and NeON Works programs. These programs provide work placements, vocational training, soft-skills development, and assistance with job searches and career planning. Participants, who range in age from 16 to 29, receive:

- **Employment training:** Group and individual job training and job search assistance designed to lead to employment
- **Education training:** Assistance enrolling in high school equivalent classes and other credential resources
- **Coaching:** Individual coaching with staff members to identify goals and address challenges that may inhibit career aspirations
- **Stipend:** A stipend of up to \$1,400 for completing personalized milestones

Conclusion

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These programs provide vital services to the youth in communities impacted by high rates of crime and divestment. In areas where the opportunity to participate in the mainstream economy is limited, these programs empower youth with business skills, educational opportunities, and culturally relevant mentors that show them the path to success, keeping them away from activities that can result in involvement in the justice system. Our youth lead the way in turning their communities into safe, welcoming neighborhoods where positive social relationships can flourish. Preventative interventions address the conditions that can lead to harm, violence, and involvement in the criminal justice system to foster community safety from the ground up.

While young people are disproportionately at risk of criminalization, crime victimization, and justice system involvement, traditionally, youth have been left out of public safety conversations. Public safety should be intrinsically connected to building pathways for individual and community growth and economic empowerment. This is a reliable method of preventing crime and enhancing safety for youth and communities at large.

In the words of a young alumnus of one of our Brooklyn-based programs, “They help us with a lot of different things here: academics, personal life—If anyone comes and sees the stuff we did, they’ll see this is a good outlet. The garden, the painting, the cleanups. It puts a smile on my face thinking about it.”⁷

We look forward to working in partnership with the Council to continue providing these essential public safety programs for our young people. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

⁷ Center for Justice Innovation (2022, January). *A Guide to Safe and Equitable Communities*. New York, NY. https://www.innovatingjustice.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2022/Guide_SafeEquitableCommunities_01282022.pdf



Testimony of Julia L. Davis, Esq.
Director of Youth Justice & Child Welfare
Children's Defense Fund-New York

The New York City Council General Welfare and Youth Services Committees
Oversight Hearing - Preventative Services for At-Risk and Justice-Involved Youth
Submitted December 18, 2023

Children's Defense Fund – New York (CDF-NY) thanks the chairs and members of the General Welfare and Youth Services Committees for the opportunity to submit written testimony in response to the recent jointly-convened Oversight Hearing - Preventative Services for At-Risk and Justice-Involved Youth.

CDF-NY is a non-profit child advocacy organization that works statewide to ensure every child in New York State has a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and a successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. As the New York office of the Children's Defense Fund, a national organization with roots in the Civil Rights Movement, we are committed to advancing racial equity and to leveling the playing field for marginalized New York children, youth and families. We envision a City where marginalized youth and families flourish, leaders prioritize their well-being and communities wield the power to ensure they thrive. Our policy priorities include racial justice, health equity, child welfare, youth justice, and economic mobility. To learn more about CDF-NY, please visit www.cdfny.org.

As you saw during the Committees' hearing and the rally earlier that day, young people from across the City are demanding that we #InvestDontArrest to support their wellbeing and community safety. The increases in juvenile detention at Crossroads and Horizon¹ require the City Council and the Administration to act immediately to restore and grow programs for young people with criminal legal system contacts, including alternative to detention services that will permit more young people to go home. Cuts to programs like ARCHES and Next Steps through the Department of Probation, as well as intensive family therapy and case management through community-based organizations like Esperanza, diminish our ability to serve young people in their own communities. The City Council and the

¹ ACS Monthly Flash Report (October 2023) Slide 22, available at: <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/flashReports/2023/10.pdf>.

Administration need to respond to these calls to restore resources for critical programs that Judges require to decarcerate more of the reported 228 young people living in detention today.²

While this urgent focus on programs for youth already detained is essential – it is not sufficient.

In addition to supporting the #InvestDontArrest coalition, CDF-NY is part of YouthNPower: Transforming Care, an intergenerational collaboration that brings together people with lived experience in the child welfare system, and those with policy, advocacy, organizing, research, and storytelling experience.³ Our work includes a direct cash transfer pilot (also known as “guaranteed income” or “universal basic income”) for 100 youth who recently aged-out of foster care in New York City, a participatory action research study on experiences of transitioning from care, and various organizing and coalition-building initiatives in New York City and State. Our collective project is to reimagine what we now know as the child welfare system, to build knowledge and power with young people most impacted, while working within a broader community of youth, advocates, organizers, researchers, artists, and policymakers through collective research, action, and direct economic support.

As Chair Ayala mentioned during the hearing, the transition from foster care is often a pipeline into the criminal legal system. This is the experience of many of the young people with whom we work and is evident from our research. Our work shows that young people need sustained support and opportunity, and while we face the crisis of youth detention in New York City, we need to widen our lens to make deeper investments that go to the roots of their needs and those of their communities.

Based on preliminary analysis of our new survey of young people aged 18-22 who recently aged-out of foster care in New York City, financial stability and finding work are top priorities.⁴ Two thirds of youth report feeling financially unstable and nearly 70% report not having any savings. Among those who are working (about half of the young people in our study), many struggle to find meaning in their labor and feel they are not fairly compensated for their work. Close to 6 in 10 who are working want to be doing something else. Most of the employment described by young people is low-wage and in a few restricted industries that are common among programs for system-involved youth: home health aides, security, food services and package delivery.

² This number is based on the testimony of the Administration for Children’s Services during the hearing on December 14, 2023.

³ YouthNPower: Transforming Care is a partnership of the Children’s Defense Fund-New York, the Public Science Project at the Graduate Center at the City University of New York, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, and New Yorkers for Children. Read more about YouthNPower: Transforming Care at www.YouthNPower.org.

⁴ YouthNPower conducted a survey of 100 youth aged 18 through 22 who recently aged-out of foster care in New York City. Selected to participate in an unconditional direct cash transfer (DCT) pilot project, these youth represent the identities and experiences of all youth who age-out of care in New York City, with respect to age, gender, race/ethnicity and LGBTQIA+ identity. The survey respondents (n=97) are participants in the YouthNPower DCT pilot who completed the survey prior to receiving their first payment.

These results corroborate findings made by New York City’s Disconnected Youth Task Force, which highlighted that although youth technically may be in the workforce, they are often employed in work that is “part-time, low wage, or both” and “not on a career path.”⁵ Our current youth employment programs do not invest in the scope and scale of resources, opportunities, and ongoing support for every young person that wants to move out of poverty. We call on the City Council to balance the urgency to reduce youth detention and immediate action around essential programs, with the need for a longer view, especially around youth opportunity for fair-wage jobs and economic mobility.

We also support urgent investments in housing for young people in New York City, the absence of which is often a driver of criminal legal system contacts. Our UNITE partnership between YouthNPower: Transforming Care and the Coalition for Homeless Youth has identified immediate steps for the City to take.⁶ Specifically, we ask that the City Council make youth categorically eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers. In May, City Council passed a groundbreaking package of bills to expand and enhance the CityFHEPS voucher program, including finally making youth in DYCD-funded RHY programs eligible. The City must implement these laws as passed on January 10, 2023. We must also restore funding for Peer Navigators in the DYCD-RHY system. In FY23 funding was awarded to hire 16 full-time peer navigators in the DYCD drop-in centers. These critical positions not only created salaried jobs for young people with the lived experience of homelessness, but they provided peer-to-peer support to some of the most vulnerable youth and young adults. We must also address the needs of migrant youth. Over the past year, RHY service providers have been serving a significant number of newly arrived young people who are seeking shelter, housing and in need of services and support, but they have not been awarded any additional funding for this work.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at the hearing and provide this supplemental written material. On behalf of CDF-NY and YouthNPower, we look forward to working with you on these important issues. You can reach me at: JDavis@childrensdefense.org.

⁵ New York City Disconnected Youth Task Force, 2021, available at: <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/youthemployment/downloads/pdf/dytf-connecting-our-future-report.pdf>.

⁶ Coalition for Homeless Youth & YouthNPower: Transforming Care, *Project UNITE Young People’s Platform for the Future of Housing in NYC* (May 2023), available at: <https://www.cdfny.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/06/UNITE-Recommendations-5.26.23.pdf>.

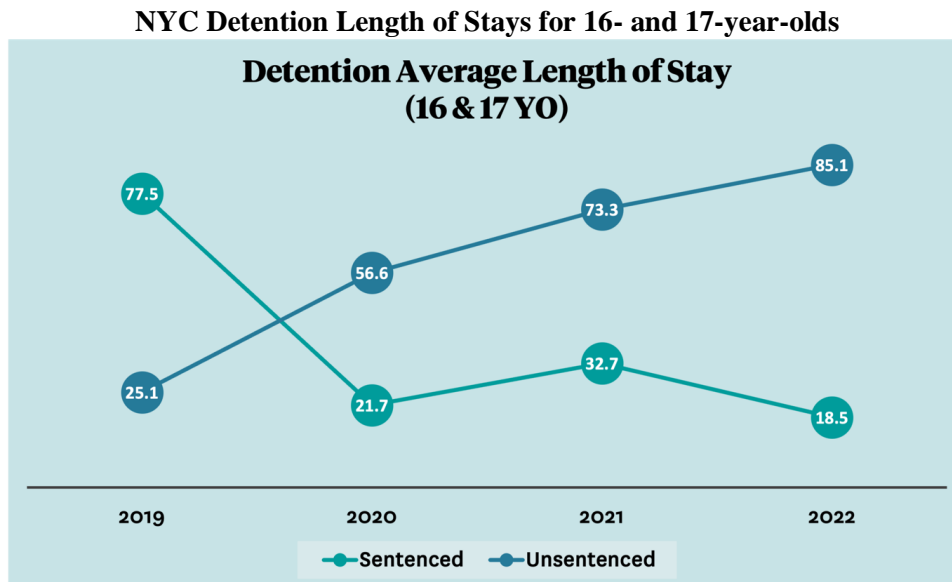
**Testimony of Caitlyn Passaretti, Policy and Advocacy Associate
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York**

**Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare
Oversight on Preventative Services for At-Risk and Justice Involved Youth.
December 14th, 2023**

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.

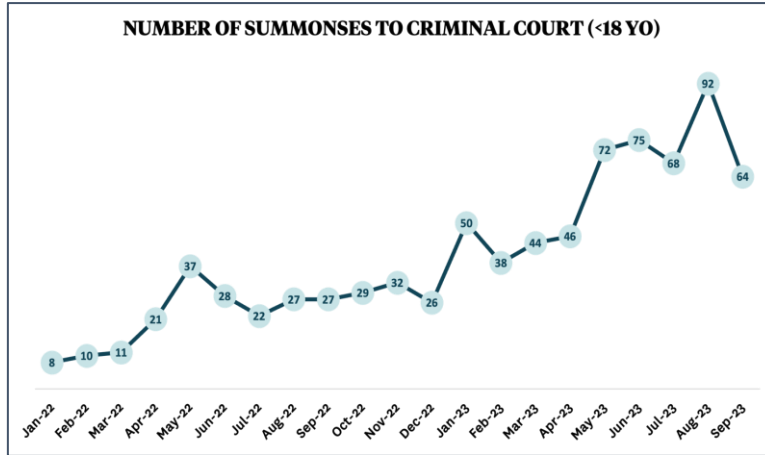
We would like to thank Chair Stevens and Chair Ayala, and all members of the Youth Services and General Welfare Committees, for holding this oversight hearing on preventative services for at-risk and justice involved youth. A robust prevention system requires robust investments. The surest way to promote youth development and success is to ensure that youth services programs are well staffed and well resourced.

Over the past few years, the number of youth entering detention in NYC has nearly doubled. This has been driven by an increase in unnecessary arrests and cuts to key services that can prevent arrest or divert a young person from detention post arrest. As a result, youth detention facilities are facing issues of overcrowding, and it has been reported that young people are sleeping in hallways or in classrooms. In addition to an increase in youth entering detention, we are also seeing the average length of stay for unsentenced youth rising to about 85 days.

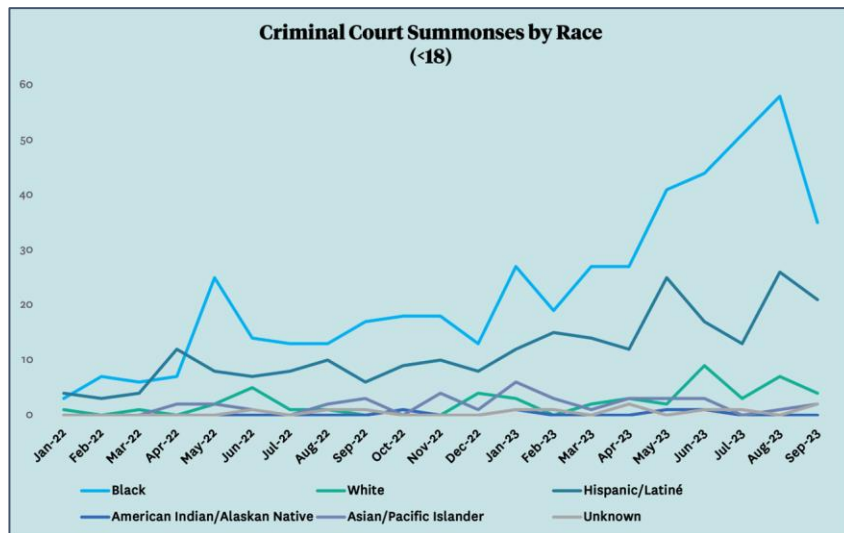


The increase of arrests can be directly tied to Mayor Adams' and the NYPD's introduction of *quality-of-life violations*, a reincarnation of broken window policing in March 2022. Incidents such as turnstile

jumping or loitering are now criminalized more severely – resulting in a court summons rather than a ticket. If a young person misses their court summons, then a warrant is placed for their arrest. In the below chart, it is clear the number of summonses to criminal court solely for quality-of-life violations has increased significantly in recent months for youth under 18.



From 2003-2022, 90 percent of people stopped by the NYPD were people of color.¹ In 2022, the first year of the Adams administration, the NYPD made over 15,000 stops, the largest number of stops since 2015. The racial disproportionality in arrests is also stark, mirroring the deeply damaging racial profiling and over-policing that occurred under broken windows policing. All of these factors are resulting in the overcrowding in detention centers. It is crucial that action is taken to reverse these trends, the city should prioritize investments in proven programming that diverts youth from detention and offers wrap-around services.



Budget Cuts are Hurting Youth

Unfortunately, the November Budget Modification has deeply damaged essential services for youth. These funding cuts to urgently needed programs will result in slowed economic recovery, continued harm

¹ New York Civil Liberties Union (2022). A Closer Look at Stop-and-Frisk in NYC. <https://www.nyclu.org/en/closer-look-stop-and-frisk-nyc>

to communities most impacted by both the pandemic and historical oppression, and ultimately in an unhealthier city.

COMPASS

Young people across the city are continuously [calling for more afterschool programs and community supports](#). Yet the cuts proposed in the November Modification promise sweeping cuts to some of the programs and services most essential to fostering youth opportunity and success.

COMPASS Afterschool programs are facing a \$1.5 million cut in FY24, and a \$6.9 million cut in the outyears. This will result in a loss of over 3,500 seats. As youth and families try to rebuild from the pandemic, our city's young people require opportunities to grow and connect with peers in ways that advance their social, emotional, and physical development as well as their academic preparedness and success. Programs like COMPASS are vital lifelines for countless youth individuals, offering crucial support, mentorship, educational opportunities, and a safe space for personal growth and development. Reductions in these programs would disproportionately impact low-income youth and families who rely on these services for their children's growth and safety and as vital resources for working caregivers. Reductions are also likely to hit hardest in communities where children, youth and families were hardest hit by the socio-economic ramifications of the pandemic.

CCC is also deeply concerned about the impact of funding cuts on summer programs, including \$19.6 million from the Summer Rising Program in FY25 (which commences July 1st, 2024) and outyears. As a result, this program will be shortened to 4 days a week for middle schoolers. Additionally, while not connected to the November Mod, federal funding for the DOE portion of Summer Rising will expire, resulting in an even larger funding gap. Youth deserve joy, fun, and positive youth development programming year-round, and we urge city leaders to reverse cuts that threaten access to these supports. We know that when there are summer programming and employment options, youth are less likely to engage in activities that can result in justice involvement, it is essential we fully fund and expand summer programs.

Probation Programs

Prevention is key to building healthier communities, and robust, wraparound supportive programs are only possible with sufficient funding. Cuts to prevention and probation programs disproportionately impact communities of color, communities which are already overburdened from the pandemic and economic hardship.

The November Budget Modification threatens crucial services for justice-involved youth.

- Close to Home, which allows youth sentenced for crimes to remain closer to families and communities while receiving therapeutic services, is facing a \$6.7 million cut.
- Raise the Age programming, which provides wrap-around services, alternatives to detention/incarceration programming, and other rehabilitation services is facing a \$2 million cut.
- The Office of Neighborhood Safety is subject to \$5.4 million in cuts in the outyears, causing a reduction to legal services, recreational events, youth service coordination and technical assistance typically offered from the Office.
- \$1.6 million is also cut for child welfare prevention re-estimates will result in fewer resources to support families experiencing child welfare involvement or youth justice system interaction.

These cuts are in addition to the \$1 million in cuts impacting FY24-FY27 to Arches, a transformative mentoring program, as well as \$2.2 million in FY24 and \$2.6 million in outyears to Next STEPS. Next

STEPS is a preventative program intended to help youth avoid criminal activity and reengage with education, work and community. Rather than reducing resources for justice-involved youth, our city should be investing in proven, cost-effective prevention programs, diversion programs, and alternatives to detention/incarceration programs

Investments Needed for Safety

New York City youth are calling for investments and care, not cuts. In CCC's most recent [Voicing Our Futures survey](#), developed and distributed by young New Yorkers, we surveyed over 1,300 NYC youth about their priorities and needs. This survey found that mental health care access, housing, employment, and extracurricular opportunities were major concerns for young people. The data collected from youth revealed that less than half of youth who reported needing mental health services could access them, and less than half received extracurricular support for academic or career development. The [2023 NYC Youth Agenda](#) also highlights demands from young New Yorkers for economic mobility through job placements, educational opportunities, housing supports, and mental health care access as top concerns and areas of need for themselves and their peers.

CCC echos the recommendations of the Youth Agenda and urges the Council to:

- **Reject and retore** the cuts to youth services and youth justice programming proposed in the November Budget Modification
- **Deepen** investments into [afterschool and summer programming](#)
- **Restore** funding to probation programs cut earlier this fall such as Next STEPS and Arches; and to the programs on Rikers cut over the summer, such as carpentry and plumbing skill building classes, financial literacy courses, cognitive behavioral therapy, drug relapse prevention and anger management programs.
- **Invest** in mental health services for youth, including by restoring \$5 million for the school-based mental health continuum, supporting the City Council's Mental Health Initiatives, and protecting critical services currently funded by temporary COVID-19 relief funding, such as social workers, Community Schools, Restorative Practice, and school psychiatrists.

Our youth deserve opportunities, not criminalization. We look forward to working with the City Council and partners across the City to oppose harmful cuts and uplift investments that help young people achieve their true potential.



Testimony of

Coalition for Homeless Youth

on

Oversight: Preventative Services for At-Risk and Justice Involved Youth

Submitted to

The New York City Council
Committees on General Welfare and Youth Services

By

Lauren Galloway
Advocacy Coordinator
Coalition for Homeless Youth

Verbal Testimony Given: December 14, 2023
Written Testimony Submitted: December 16, 2023

Introduction

The Coalition for Homeless Youth (CHY) welcomes the opportunity to submit written testimony focusing on how New York City can improve the preventative services for at-risk and justice involved youth to the New York City Council Committees on General Welfare, and Youth Services. We also greatly appreciate the Council's support in highlighting the needs of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in New York City.

Who are Runaway and Homeless Youth?

RHY are generally defined as unaccompanied young people who have run away or been forced to leave home and now reside in temporary situations, places not otherwise intended for habitation, or emergency shelters. The federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act defines the population as being between 12-24 years of age. As of April 2017, New York State redefined RHY to be anyone under the age of 25 years¹.

On a single night in 2022, 3,594 unaccompanied and parenting youth under age 25 were counted as experiencing homelessness in the NYC Point in Time (PIT) count.² In NYC Fiscal Year 2023, 3,182 RHY, were served in DYCD RHY residential programs, including 326 minors.³ 37,125 RHY received non-residential services at a DYCD RHY drop-in center or through street-outreach⁴. In 2021, DHS reported a total of 4,051 unaccompanied or parenting youth between the ages of 18 and 25 entering either single adult or family shelters,⁵ and the Department of Education (DOE) reported that during the 2019-2020 school year, almost 7,500 unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness attended NYC public schools.⁶

Like all other segments of NYC's homeless population, RHY experience harm that disproportionately impacts their health and creates roadblocks to long-term wellness. This is most recently detailed in "*Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness (OSH)*."⁷ In the OSH report, it details the myriad of harms that confront RHY, include: increased mental health problems and trauma, substance use, exposure to victimization and criminal activity, and unsafe sex practices. More specifically that almost 50% of youth served at New York State RHY programs reported needing mental health services, and in NYC over 90% of homeless youth have reported experiencing trauma, 92% self-reported having anxiety or depression, 69% reported using drugs and 60% specifically self-reported that they had been diagnosed with having bipolar disorder.⁸ Furthermore, homeless youth also experience increased levels of criminalization and discrimination due to their intersecting identities. In NYC, over 90% of homeless youth identify as a race other than white (non-Hispanic) and LGBTQ/TGNC youth are also overrepresented in the RHY population⁹.

Youth-Specific Shelters and Services Make a Measurable, Positive Difference

The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) has been designated the county youth bureau for NYC and is responsible for serving RHY under the NYRHYA.¹⁰ While many RHY also seek services within the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and the Human Resources Administration (HRA) continuum of shelters, homeless youth, advocates, and RHY providers agree that the outcomes for many homeless youth improve with increased access to youth-specific shelters and services. This was proved in a groundbreaking white paper was released by the Center for Drug Use and HIV Research at NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing in with the Coalition for Homeless Youth. One of the most significant findings of the study is that high quality RHY programs not only meet basic requirements, but "address higher order relational, psychological, and motivational needs... fostering a sense of resilience among RHY" and

¹ <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/EXC/A19-H>

² https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_PopSub_CoC_NY-600-2022_NY_2022.pdf

³ https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/FY23_LL86_RHY_Demographics-and-Services_Report-Final.pdf

⁴ Ibid

⁵ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2022/NYC-Community-Plan-DIGITAL.pdf>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ New York State FY 2018-19 budget included amendments to the NYRHYA that expand the age range for RHY services and youth-centered beds to 25 years old. The amendments took effect January 1, 2018. (SFY 2018-19 Budget, Part M S2006-c/30060c; see https://www.budget.ny.gov/pubs/press/2017/pressRelease17_enactedPassage.html).

providing long-term benefits to a youth's functioning.¹¹ *In short, well-funded, high quality RHY programs make a positive impact on a youth's ability to stabilize and successfully transition from crisis to independence.* While more research is needed to evaluate the long-term benefits of RHY services, understanding that these programs make a proven difference to the youth they serve gives further support to why we have continued pushing for more shelter beds and services for youth experiencing homelessness.

RHY Program Are Preventative Services for At-Risk and Justice Involved Youth

Young people run away and/or become homeless for many complex reasons, and we know that young people living on the streets or those that do not have stable safe housing are highly vulnerable and therefore are at risk of or have touched the criminal legal system at a higher than their housed peers¹². This disproportionality is also linked to the over criminalization of black and brown young people and those that identify as LGBTQIA+¹³. In NYC, close to 60% of RHY in DYCD residential programs identify as black, whereas only 29% of all NYC youth identify as black, and 1/3 of RHY in DYCD residential programs identify as LGBTQIA+ compared to 19% of all NYC high school students¹⁴. At their core, RHY programs are acting as both preventative services for young people at risk of juvenile justice involvement and support services for those that already are or have been, but yet they are provided no additional funding or recognition for the work that they do and do well.

CHY echoes the recommendations outline by our allies at the Children's Defense Fund NY, and recommends the following to more adequately meet the needs of RHY that may or have juvenile justice involvement:

- **Make youth categorically eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers**
In May, City Council passed a groundbreaking package of bills to expand and enhance the CityFHEPS voucher program, including finally making youth in DYCD-funded RHY programs eligible. This is a critical investment that will support the Administration's initiatives to eradicate homelessness, to prevent people from entering DHS shelters unnecessarily and to make access to vouchers easier. Therefore, the City must implement these laws as passed on January 10, 2024.
- **Restore funding for Peer Navigators in the DYCD-RHY system**
In response to the priorities set forth in [Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness](#), and based on the success of the CHY Homeless Youth Peer Navigator Program (HYPNP), funding was allocated for 16 full-time Peer Navigator positions across the DYCD-funded Drop-in Centers in FY23. These critical positions provided peer-to-peer support to some of the most vulnerable youth and young adults. Unfortunately, only a year later (FY24), the funding for these positions was cut. This led to youth with lived experience will losing their jobs, and countless other youth missing out on the benefit of peer-on-peer support. This funding must be restored.
- **Increase DYCD-RHY beds for young adults ages 21-24 yo**
There are currently only 60-funded young adult beds in the DYCD RHY system for youth ages 21-24, however they do not come close to meeting the need. In order to ensure that older youth can benefit from the safety and security of youth specific shelter supports, the number of beds for 21-24yo must be increase.
- **Create mental health focused RHY Transitional Independent Living Programs (TIL)**
Young people often share that they wish they had better access to meaningful mental health supports. Providers continue to express that they often do not have the staff capacity or appropriate structure to support RHY who have significant mental health needs. The City should fund programs to serve RHY

¹¹ Gwadz, M., Freeman, R., Cleland, C.M., Ritchie, A.S., Leonard, N.R., Hughes, C., Powlovich, J., & Schoenberg, J. (2017). Moving from crisis to independence: The characteristic, quality, and impact of specialized settings for runaway and homeless youth. New York: Center for Drug Use and HIV Research, NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing. *See page 16.*

¹² <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/runaway-and-homeless-youth/juvenile-justice-system>

¹³ https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2019/01/22/lgbtq_youth/

¹⁴ ¹⁴ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2022/NYC-Community-Plan-DIGITAL.pdf>

with mental and behavioral health needs, mirroring what already exists in the DHS system, these programs would include on-site clinical services, and intensive case management to provide youth with the services they need.

- **“Right-size” Runaway and Homeless Youth service provider contracts**
DYCD-funded RHY provider contracts continue to fall short of covering the true cost of running the programs. Contract increases must be implemented for all current DYCD-funded residential, street-outreach and drop-in center RHY contracts.
- **Addressing the Needs of Newly Arrived Youth & Young Adults**
Like many nonprofits in other sectors, RHY service providers, the majority of whom are funded by DYCD, have been seeing a significant influx of newly arrived youth coming to their programs seeking shelter, housing and in need of services and support. CHY and its member providers continued to be confused and concerned by the lack of system coordination the city has implemented to support the needs of these youth, as well as the RHY providers that are serving them.

Providers report that there are currently hundreds of newly arrived youth accessing services in the RHY system, and despite working tirelessly to meet the needs of this growing population of young people, without additional funding or city support, some RHY providers have already been faced with having to implement long waitlists and having to turn youth away due to lack of capacity. This is only resulting in more young people on the streets, which not only impacts their emotional and physical health, but increases their likelihood of involvement in the criminal legal system.

For questions please contact:

Lauren Galloway

Coalition for Homeless Youth, Lauren@nychy.org

The Coalition for Homeless Youth

Founded in 1978 as the Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services, The Coalition for Homeless Youth (CHY) is a consortium of 65 agencies whose mission is, as a membership organization, to use its collective voice to promote the safety, health, and future of runaway, homeless and street involved youth through advocacy, authentic collaboration with youth and young adults (YYA) with lived expertise and training and technical assistance.

CHY is primarily an advocacy organization, leveraging the expertise and experience of its membership as well as YYA with the lived experience of homelessness to shape the landscape for runaway and homeless youth across New York State. This is achieved by increasing public awareness, coalition building, policy work and public advocacy campaigns for pertinent legislation and funding. Notably, in 2015, CHY was instrumental in the advocacy efforts that resulted in the doubling of the State budget for runaway and homeless youth services. CHY's advocacy also contributed to the development of NYS statutory and regulatory changes that became effective in 2018, permitting localities across the State to extend length of stay and increase age of youth served by RHY programs in their communities. Most recently, we passed state legislation this session that will grant decisionally capable runaway and homeless minors the ability to consent to their own health care, including gender-affirming care. As well as NYC legislation that we maintain gives both homeless youth and youth aging out of foster care access to city-sponsored housing vouchers.

An additional area of focus for CHY is the strengthening of service delivery for runaway and homeless youth, primarily through the provision of specialized trainings and technical support. Until 2019, CHY held the state contract to provide annual web-based trainings, on diverse topic areas, to providers across the state, reaching hundreds of professionals working with homeless and runaway youth. Since 2019, CHY has continued to provide training and technical assistance on a smaller scale due to funding restrictions; however, resuming this service remains a top priority for our membership.

Lastly, and most importantly, as a coalition and voice for a community that is often overlooked, underrepresented and under-resourced, CHY prides itself on ensuring that the majority of our staff have the lived experience of youth homelessness. Our commitment to giving power to those with lived experience is also prioritized through our support of the New York City Youth Action Board (YAB), as well as our annual Youth Advocacy Fellowship Program and new Homeless Youth Peer Navigation Pilot. These initiatives not only expand the way that CHY is authentically collaborating with YYA who have the lived experience of homelessness, but it also awards us the ability to work together with YYA, to give them the tools and supports needed so that they can effectively create change.



**Presented before the New York City Council
Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare
Oversight Hearing: Preventative Services for At-Risk and Justice Involved Youth
December 14, 2023**

Thank you, Chair Althea Stevens and Chair Diana Ayala for the opportunity to testify at today's oversight hearing on Preventative Services for At-Risk and Justice Involved Youth. I am Dr. Xellex Rivera, Chief Program Officer at the Housing Solutions of New York (HSNY), formerly known as the Bronx Parent Housing Network.

HSNY is dedicated to ending homelessness in New York City. We accomplish our mission by delivering essential support services, as well as creating holistic paths to employment and stability so that individuals and families experiencing homelessness can secure and retain safe, clean, affordable, and permanent housing. In addition to addressing homelessness, we also support individuals who are at risk for involvement with the criminal justice system through our Work Plus Program.

We know that this is a challenging time for our city. With COVID 19 federal funding ending and increasing asylum seeker related costs, city leaders are working diligently to mitigate a potential financial crisis. We commend Speaker Adams, the Council and the Mayoral Administration for their leadership at this time.

The Need for Programs that Support At-Risk and Justice Involved Youth

In early fall, the city Council's Criminal Justice Committee held a hearing on the Department of Correction and Department of Probation's (DOP) Programming and Reentry Services. During this hearing, HSNY joined advocates in testifying about the importance of maintaining funding for vital programs that support at risk and justice involved youth because from experience, we know that these programs are effective.

Further, the data for justice involved youth is alarming. [Three out of four](#) young people involved with the Department of Juvenile Justice face re-incarceration and it costs up to [\\$200,000](#) per year to incarcerate a young person. Hence, it is crucial that city leaders leverage resources to decrease recidivism because it is the morally right thing to do *and* because it is also cost beneficial to our city. The programs offered by the DOP to support justice involved youth provides an opportunity to change the trajectory of at risk and justice involved young people. These programs include high school equivalency classes, employment preparation, mentoring, healthcare, literacy programs, and more.

HSNY's Work Plus Program

Housing Solutions of New York is pleased to be one of fourteen New York City providers offering flexible work readiness wrap-around services to young adults aged 16 to 30 who have



been impacted by gun violence through the DOP's Work Plus Program. This [program](#) offers an array of services to improve work readiness and employability and it offers individualized support with developing soft skills, basic life skills, family strengthening, economic opportunity/employment, and social networking and community benefit projects. The HSNY Work Plus Program serves individuals in the catchment area of the 42nd Precinct using a cohort model. HSNY currently has 13 youth enrolled in its Work Plus Program.

Given our experience of operating the Work Plus Program for three years, we know firsthand how important these services are for young people and the community. Working collaboratively with the 42nd Precinct, the Work Plus program has made an impact on 40 youth-serving individuals who dropped out of high school to those who graduated. Of the students we serve, 98.3% are minorities and all participants have a low-income background. Our program specializes in youth engagement, community involvement, and work readiness. The HSNY Work Plus program also has partnered with the Connections to Cares: Building Resilience in Youth Program that launched in September 2022. This program partnership now highlights work readiness, employment preparation as well and mental health services.

Recommendations

We urge the city to cancel plans to cut funding for programs that support individuals on probation. Programs like the Work Plus program provide an opportunity for individuals to reintegrate into society, and it can reduce the risk of long-term violence. Instead of reducing funding for programs, the city should be increasing support. We recommend that the city adopts a more holistic approach for the Work Plus program by integrating strategies that work. For example, DOP could integrate the Connections to Care (C2C) program into the Work Plus program model to help pair young people with mental health services and support. We know that many criminal justice involved individuals endure mental health challenges and this strategy could make this vital program even more impactful.

Our city's most vulnerable youth rely on preventative services and programs to help set them on a positive path. It is imperative that city leaders ensure that such programs have the funding and resources required to be effective.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and the opportunity to present this comprehensive testimony. For further inquiries, please contact Dr. Xellex Z. Rivera at x.rivera@hsfn.org.

December 11, 2023

Subject: Urgent Testimony on the Impact of Proposed 5% Cuts to Nonprofit Organizations

Dear NYC Council Finance,

We are writing to you on behalf of PowerPlay NYC, a nonprofit organization deeply embedded in the fabric of our community. We appreciate your commitment to our City's well-being and would like to bring to your attention the profound impact the proposed 5% cuts in January could have on the vital programs and services we provide. Through our STARS CGI program, PowerPlay NYC is dedicated to advancing the lives of girls through sports, helping them grow physically, emotionally, and academically stronger. We offer opportunities for girls where they would not otherwise exist, partnering with schools and community-based organizations to conduct after-school and summer programs emphasizing physical literacy, health and wellness, and leadership. Our programs have consistently played a vital role in enhancing the lives of girls in New York City.

The additional 5% planned cuts in January would be nothing short of detrimental to the continued operation of community programs like ours. We are already witnessing the adverse effects of the previous cuts, and further reductions would only exacerbate the challenges faced by our young people. Organizations like PowerPlay NYC and our STARS CGI program touches every vital aspect of daily life - from public education, health and human services, cultural enrichment to language access. Our organization, alongside others, plays an integral role in contributing to the well-being of our community members.

We respectfully request your support in advocating for the preservation of vital services provided by nonprofit organizations. Any additional cuts to the nonprofit sector will undermine the public safety, health, and cleanliness of New York City. We call on the City to partner with the nonprofit sector and work toward creative solutions that prioritize the continued growth and prosperity of our City.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We appreciate your dedication to the well-being of New Yorkers and look forward to working together to find sustainable solutions.

Sincerely,

Nicole Mussenden
President & CEO

Joneé Billy
Sr. Director of Strategic Partnerships & External Affairs



JUSTICE MATTERS IT'S YOUR RIGHT

Queens Defenders Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Youth Services & Committee on General Welfare | December 14, 2023 | 1:00 pm

PREVENTATIVE SERVICES FOR AT-RISK & JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUTH

Good afternoon and thank you to the New York City Council's Committee on Youth Services and Committee on General Welfare for the invitation to provide testimony on preventive services for at-risk and justice-involved youth. I am Brian Schatz, Director of External Affairs at Queens Defenders – a public defense organization representing 20,000 clients each year in Queens Criminal Court, Family Court, and treatment courts.

Since our founding nearly 30 years ago, Queens Defenders attorneys have consistently observed that many of the youth we represent have difficulty obtaining part- or full-time employment and professional development and educational opportunities. Many become ensnared in the criminal legal system while carrying unresolved trauma resulting from lifetimes of abuse, neglect, domestic violence, housing insecurity, food insecurity, immigration issues, community violence, and ongoing educational, social, and racial inequity.

And it has only gotten worse for the young people we represent.

These same challenges have been further exacerbated by underperforming schools and the widening achievement gap made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, historic underinvestment in low-income communities, and policies that promote over-policing of Black and Brown communities over restorative and strengths-based programming aimed at uplifting our city's young people.

Youth caught in the criminal legal system face further traumatic experiences.

Discriminatory practices among law enforcement have traditionally targeted young people of color. Correctional facilities in New York have been plagued by mismanagement, abhorrent living conditions for incarcerated individuals, and prolific violence and abuse. And recent reports of overcrowding in the city's youth detention centers have led to youth sleeping on floors in common areas and has led to violent interactions among residents and gang-affiliated visitors to the facilities.

The lack of options available to youth involved in the criminal legal system approaches the margins of systematic abandonment of their potential, and I call on the New York City

Council to address this urgent issue that impacts thousands of our city's young people who are arrested each year.

Youth who are court-involved require investments that create access to mental health and substance use treatment, effective programming for reducing gang involvement, and opportunities to build confidence in themselves and their abilities. They require access to programming that broadens their horizons and illuminates pathways to education, training opportunities, and rewarding and well-paying careers. They need to experience the benefits of a mentor and learn how to navigate life's challenges under the guidance of a robust support network.

This can only be accomplished through well-resourced programs that begin with connecting youth to services that address the underlying issues that led to their arrest. Then we must focus on elevating the expectations of our young people so they can see themselves entering professional fields including technology, media, business, and others, and we must be willing and able to value their time by offering incentives for participation – from stipends to part-time wages – while helping them build a resume and job skills.

I am aware of the numerous competing priorities that the City of New York faces, and I firmly believe that creating opportunities for youth facing criminal charges that mirror opportunities accessible to their more affluent peers is one of the most important investments we can make. I request that the NYC Council thoroughly consider sufficient funding allocations for preventive programming for court-involved youth that ensure equity, address underlying mental health and psychosocial issues, and help young people realize their full potential free of further criminal legal system involvement.

Contact information:

Lori Zeno, Executive Director & Founder
lzeno@queensdefenders.org
(718)261-3047



Dear Council Members,

On behalf of Row New York, I would like to thank you for your support of Sports Training and Role-models for Success Citywide Girls Initiative (STARS CGI), now in its tenth year. As you know, since its inception, STARS CGI has provided critical services for girls and women of color, including youth identifying outside the gender binary, in the form of athletics, academics, and arts programming.

A full restoration of the STARS CGI Budget for City Fiscal Year 2025 will ensure that Row New York and the nine other partner organizations will continue to have the resources necessary to provide the youth we serve with the tools to overcome barriers to success, grow emotionally, academically and physically stronger, and develop as leaders in their communities.

As a STARS partner, we at Row New York are doing everything we can to support our participants. We offer a sports-based youth development program that provides not only rowing, but a structured Student Support and Success curriculum that provides academic support with trained tutors; group workshops that prepare students for college and future careers; SAT Prep and individualized assistance with college applications; counseling with our social worker; and a variety of other program units that cover topics like financial literacy, mental health, and social issues.

In addition, we have successfully introduced a new college success peer mentoring program for Row New York alumni in partnership with College Access: Research & Action (CARA) to support our students throughout their college experience, and introduced a new intermediate program option that allows students to participate four days per week in comparison to the traditional six day schedule.

Each year we see remarkable achievements from our students on and off the water. We are pleased to report that 100 percent of our graduating seniors in the Class of 2023 completed high school within four years and were accepted to college. These students are now attending schools including Princeton, Cornell, Purdue, and other competitive SUNY, CUNY, and private schools. This year we were also able to bring our team to participate in the New York state rowing championships after several years of Covid related race cancellations.

We are so grateful for the City Council's leadership and their support of STARS CGI and the partner organizations for making work like ours possible. We thank you on behalf of the girls of this city that have received invaluable support throughout this pandemic, and urge you to continue your support in the coming year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel Cytron".

Rachel Cytron, Executive Director of Row New York



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**New York City Council
Joint Hearing
Committee on General Welfare
Committee on Youth Services
December 14, 2023**

**Hearing on Oversight:
Preventative Services for At-Risk and Justice-Involved Youth**

Testimony of The Legal Aid Society

199 Water Street
New York, NY 10038
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Prepared by:
Lisa Freeman
Judith Harris
Kathryn Wood
Danah Jones

The Legal Aid Society thanks Chairs Ayala and Stevens, and the respective members of the Committee on General Welfare and the Committee for Youth Services for holding this oversight hearing on Preventative Services for At-Risk and Justice-Involved Youth. We strongly urge the City Council to continue to exercise its oversight powers to ensure that adequate and effective preventative services are available to youth who are either at-risk of involvement or already involved with the legal system as the result of an arrest. These programs are especially critical given the current overcrowding crisis in secure juvenile detention facilities that has led to dangerous and inhumane conditions for young people.

Preventive services can either be voluntary (separate from court involvement) or court-mandated (after an arrest, connected with a court case). The latter are usually part of Alternative to Detention, Alternative to Incarceration, or Alternative to Placement Programs. There is a great need for both *voluntary* preventative services in our schools and communities to divert youth from the legal system, as well as for more court-mandated programs to end unnecessary detention and incarceration and prevent recidivism.

THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY

The Legal Aid Society represents the majority of children and youth prosecuted in New York City's Family Courts and Criminal Courts. We have dedicated teams of lawyers, social workers, paralegals and investigators devoted to serving the unique needs of children and youth, including those charged as juvenile delinquents, juvenile offenders and adolescent offenders. The Legal Aid Society's Juvenile Rights Practice represents the majority of youth prosecuted in Family Court in New York City. The Legal Aid Society's Criminal Defense Practice represents the majority of indigent defendants prosecuted in Criminal Court in New York City. The Juvenile Rights Practice and the Criminal Defense Practice's Adolescent Intervention and Diversion (AID)

Unit have adopted an integrated representation model to ensure seamless and comprehensive representation of 16- and 17-year-old youths who appear in the Youth Part, the majority of whose cases are removed to Family Court. In addition to representing our clients in trial and appellate courts, we also pursue impact litigation and other law reform initiatives, and our Educational Advocacy Project assists with client school issues.

NYC HAS A CRITICAL SHORTAGE OF YOUTH PREVENTATIVE SERVICES AND ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS.

We urge the City Council to ensure that enough preventive services and alternative programs are available for young people. Community-based services – including mental health treatment, educational supports, and employment opportunities – are necessary to ensure youth remain in the community, avoid arrest, and, if already involved in the legal system, do not languish in detention or incarceration. The young people who suffer most from the lack of appropriate preventative services and alternative programs are almost all Black and brown youth from under-resourced neighborhoods.

This is an **urgent public safety issue**, as NYC communities greatly benefit from diverting youth away from the legal system and preventing criminal activity. Despite this need, there is currently insufficient programming available to serve at-risk and justice-involved youth. This leads to unnecessary detention and incarceration in situations where both the individual and the community would be better served by intensive, community-based services. Further, at a time when both youth secure detention facilities are over capacity, resulting in the dangerous “housing” of youth in classrooms and deprivation of basic care and safety in the facilities,¹ the need for preventive programs is even more urgent.

¹ <https://gothamist.com/news/teens-in-nyc-detention-centers-are-sleeping-on-the-ground-due-to-overcrowding-staff-say>

VOLUNTARY PREVENTATIVE SERVICES

Most arrests in New York City come from a handful of neighborhoods.² Thus, it is important that these communities have sufficient voluntary preventative services for youth to prevent legal system involvement, including programming and mental health care available through neighborhood schools. The school setting presents an ideal opportunity for increased preventative services programs.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline Must be Disrupted.

The “school-to-prison pipeline” refers to policies and practices that push NYC's schoolchildren, especially the most at-risk children, out of classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal legal systems. Students may find themselves in this pipeline as a result of zero-tolerance disciplinary policies which involve the New York City Police Department (NYPD) in minor normative misbehavior, often leading to arrests. Many of these NYPD encounters result in restraint and harm to the youth and almost all involve children of color. For example, a June 2021 report by Advocates for Children indicated that in nearly 10% of “child in crisis” interventions, the NYPD responded to a student’s mental health crisis by handcuffing the child with metal or Velcro restraints.³ The report indicated that Black and Latinx youth comprised about two-thirds of the student population but accounted for 92% of the students in emotional crisis on whom the NYPD used handcuffs.⁴

Research documenting the school-to-prison pipeline indicates that students who experience exclusionary discipline like suspension or expulsion are more likely to become ensnared in the

² See e.g., <https://equity.nyc.gov/domains/personal-and-community-safety/arrests> (citing seven neighborhood accounting for a disproportionate number of arrests).

³ Advocates for Children, “Police Response to Students in Emotional Crisis (June 2021) https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/police_response_students_in_crisis.pdf?pt=1

⁴ *Id.*

juvenile and or criminal legal system.⁵ The educational, mental health, and/or other needs of many of these young people are not being met within the school system resulting in behaviors that lead to arrests.⁶ Providing increased preventative services in schools would be a step towards addressing the roots of this pipeline, by ensuring that students feel safe and supported. Neighborhood schools need more counselors, mental health services and supportive interventions, both during school hours and in after-school programs. Increasing access to preventative services and behavioral supports in the school setting is crucial to decrease arrests, marginalization, and criminalization of youth, as well as contribute to public safety.

Increased Access to Mental Health Services for Youth is Direly Needed.

Youth diagnosed with mental health disorders continue to be disproportionately represented in the juvenile legal system.⁷ Indeed, at-risk and juvenile legal system-involved youth “have more significant behavioral health concerns . . . , adverse childhood experiences, and mental health problems compared with the general youth population.”⁸ This is due in large part to the lack of access to appropriate mental health services in the community to address underlying issues with which a young person may be struggling.⁹ As has been repeatedly documented and reported, there are too few counselors and mental health supports available to youth in the City’s schools and communities.¹⁰ More preventive services and programs with a mental health component are

⁵ See “Disrupting the School-Prison Nexus in New York” (1/5/2023), <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/news/disrupting-school-prison-nexus-new-york>

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Intersection between Mental Health and the Juvenile Justice System, Literature Review: A Product of the Model Programs Guide, Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention (July 2017), <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/model-programs-guide/literature-reviews/intsection-between-mental-health-and-the-juvenile-justice-system.pdf>.

⁸ Gail A. Wasserman, Ph.D. et. al., The Missing Link(age): Multilevel Contributors to Service Uptake Failure Among Youths on Community Justice Supervision, 72 *Psychiatric Serv.* 5, at 548 (Mar. 26, 2021), available at <https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/epdf/10.1176/appi.ps.202000163>.

⁹ See, e.g., The Healing-Centered Schools Task Force Report, July 2021, available at <https://advocate.nyc.gov/static/assets/HCSHF%20Recommendations%20Report.pdf>, at pp. 20-21.

¹⁰ *Id.*

critically needed to prevent entanglement in the legal system.¹¹ Schools are an excellent site for these services, as data has shown youth are 21 times more likely to seek support for mental health issues at school than at a community-based clinic.¹² Data also indicates that school-based mental health services reduce racial disparities in access to mental health care.¹³

NYC youth emphasized their needs for mental health services in their 2023 Youth Agenda.¹⁴ According to the Youth Ask Youth Census, over 35% of youth did not have access to mental health services when they needed them, and almost 30% of surveyed youth could not access medication, support groups, trusted people to speak with, or general counseling when they needed it.¹⁵ This is an unacceptable reality for youth who are also reporting high rates of stress and anxiety. Young people urgently need interventions that offer care and support, not punitive interventions. Increasing preventative services with counselors and mental health treatment is key to averting system involvement.

PREVENTIVE SERVICES FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUTH

Alternatives to detention (ATDs), alternatives to incarceration (ATIs), and alternatives to placement¹⁶ (ATPs) -- collectively referred to here as “Alternative Programs” -- inherently contain a preventative services component for justice-involved youth. Alternative Programs provide services and supports critically needed by justice-involved individuals without jeopardizing public

¹¹ See Advocates for Children Op-Ed “Help Kids Mental Health Through Their Schools“ (2/27/2023), at <https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/node/2166>. (According to the School-Based Health Alliance, of students who successfully engage in mental health treatment, more than 70% initiated services through school.)

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ See <https://yvoteny.org/nyc-youth-agenda/>

¹⁵ See <https://yvoteny.org/nyc-youth-agenda/>. See also Advocates for Children Op-Ed “Help Kids Mental Health Through Their Schools“ (2/27/2023), at <https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/node/2166>, indicating that “[w]hen Mental Health America recently asked young people what mental health supports they need, ‘access to mental health professionals at school’ was among the top resources they requested.”

¹⁶ For youth prosecuted in Family Court, a carceral disposition in a case is called “placement” rather than “incarceration.”

safety, and can be particularly important for preventing recidivism. Ensuring an adequate array of effective Alternative Programs must be a priority for NYC. These must become an integral part and partner of the City's juvenile legal system.

There is an acute need for this programming now as the City's secure detention facilities are overcrowded and youth continue to be placed in dangerous and inhumane conditions. **Since at least October, the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) has gotten a waiver from New York State to allow youth charged as juvenile delinquents and juvenile to be housed in classrooms.**¹⁷ Youth are reporting unsurprising and unacceptable difficulties with this new arrangement, including assaults and constant fear of assault, long waits to use the bathroom, no access to clean clothing or bedding, and being woken at 5 a.m. to be moved out of classroom so that instruction may begin and then being placed in other temporary areas. This level of instability is unsafe and places all youth in the facility at risk. Given this critical issue currently facing youth in detention, Alternative Programs are important now more than ever.

NYC's Juvenile Legal System – A Brief Overview

ACS's Division of Youth and Family Justice (DYFJ) is responsible for the detention of all youth in New York City and for the placement of youth adjudicated as juvenile delinquents (JDs). Currently, youth between the age of 12 and 18 can be charged as juvenile delinquents and prosecuted in Family Court.¹⁸ Children ages 13-15 who are charged with certain specified crimes may be prosecuted as juvenile offenders (JOs) in Criminal Court. Youth charged with more serious crimes at age 16 or 17 may be prosecuted as adolescent offenders (AOs) in Criminal Court.

¹⁷ <https://gothamist.com/news/teens-in-nyc-detention-centers-are-sleeping-on-the-ground-due-to-overcrowding-staff-say>

¹⁸ Children ages 7-12 can also be arrested and charged as juvenile delinquents but only for specific enumerated crimes, including homicide.

If detained, children and youth are remanded to ACS custody. ACS DYFJ operates two detention facilities: Crossroads Juvenile Center in Brooklyn and Horizon Juvenile Center in the Bronx. Each of these facilities is authorized to hold JDs, JOs, and AOs.

ACS also contracts with nonprofits for the operation of nonsecure detention facilities (NSDs). Only youth charged as JDs can be remanded to NSDs, which, while designated as “non-secure,” are nonetheless locked facilities. Each NSD facility has the capacity to house twelve detained youth. ATDs are intended to prevent a youth from being placed in one of these facilities.

In addition to detention, ACS DYFJ is responsible for and oversees the “Close to Home” (CTH) placement facilities where youth adjudicated juvenile delinquent (JD) are placed. ACS DYFJ contracts with not-for-profit agencies who operate these congregate residential placement facilities, which include both non-secure placement (NSP) and limited secure placement (LSP). As indicated above, an ATP would be a community-based dispositional alternative with intensive services for an adjudicated JD, instead of placement in a facility such as CTH.

Racial Disproportionality Pervades Detention and Placement

Appalling and longstanding racial disparities exist in NYC’s juvenile legal system; justice-involved children and teens are almost exclusively poor and Black or brown. According to ACS Detention Demographic Data for FY 21, 66.9% of all New York City youth admitted to secure detention facilities in 2021 self-identified as Black, despite Black children representing only 22% of the population of children in NYC.¹⁹ Similarly, 71.9% of those admitted to non-secure detention facilities identified as Black.²⁰ Additionally, many youth of color have experienced trauma and at

¹⁹ <https://cccnewyork.org/data-publications/keeping-track-of-nyc-children-2022/?section=Who+Are+New+York+City%27s+Children%3F>

²⁰ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2021/DetentionDemographicReportFY21.pdf>

least one significant issue beyond poverty that causes instability in their lives.²¹ These injustices are rooted in racial inequities that permeate society; the juvenile legal system included.

Increased Census of Youth in Secure Detention

Juvenile detention facilities have seen a dramatic increase in population since early 2019.²² According to The Mayor’s Management Report for Fiscal Year 2023 (MMR) the average daily population in juvenile detention has risen from 45 in 2019 to 198 in Fiscal 2023.²³ The MMR attributes the increased census to the fact that the “majority of young people in detention are now older Adolescent Offenders with pending cases in the adult criminal court system, which is a lengthier process than Family Court.”²⁴ As explained in the next section, it is a matter of public safety and intelligent policy to avoid unnecessary detention because it exposes youth to potential trauma, exacerbates mental health issues, increases the likelihood of further system involvement, and has a long-term negative impact on youth. With this increased census it is particularly essential to examine and address the dearth of appropriate Alternative Programs, which, as indicated above, inherently contain a preventative component. We urge the City to take all reasonable steps to address this important issue.

ATDs, ATIs, and ATPs are Essential and Effective Interventions for Youth.

It is well established that community-based alternatives to detention, incarceration, and placement *work*.²⁵ Effective programs *increase public safety* by providing individuals with the tools they need to succeed. Alternative Programs are particularly effective for those under age 25.

²¹ See pp. 20-23 of <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/flashReports/2022/05.pdf>

²² Mayor’s Management Report for Fiscal Year 2023 at p. 232. Available at https://donbuqm3ub5fw.cloudfront.net/files/2023_mmr_ce1a8eaa8b.pdf

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ See, e.g., The U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s Literature Review regarding “Alternatives to Detention and Confinement,” available at https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/model-programs-guide/literature-reviews/alternatives_to_detection_and_confinement.pdf (August 2014) (“research has shown that juveniles who are kept in the community recidivate less often than previously detained youths”).

Science has established that the adolescent brain is not fully developed until approximately age 25,²⁶ providing an important window for assisting youth in developing pro-social behaviors. For example, programs that provide viable credible mentors and assist youth in coping with stressors offer effective support for youth during their formative years.²⁷

Alternative Programs also are dramatically more cost effective than incarceration. According to the Justice Policy Institute, New York spends nearly \$900,000 per youth in confinement per year.²⁸ Instead, New York should invest this money into Alternative Programs, which are proven to prevent recidivism and further costly detention or incarceration. Studies have established that rather than improving public safety, incarcerating youth *increases* the likelihood that they will reoffend as compared to community-based programming.²⁹ In addition, the individual youth are not only more likely to recidivate as a result of incarceration, but are also likely to be harmed and possibly even traumatized by the experience of incarceration.³⁰

²⁶ The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2019. The National Academies Press. Available at, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK545481/pdf/Bookshelf_NBK545481.pdf at 18.

²⁷ https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK545481/pdf/Bookshelf_NBK545481.pdf at 18. 9 Raposa, Rhodes, Stams, et al. The Effects of Youth Mentoring Programs: A Meta-analysis of Outcome Studies. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 48, 423 –443 (2019) Support that mentoring interventions can have positive outcomes for youth. Available at, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-00982-8>

²⁸ Justice Policy Institute, *Sticker Shock 2020: The Cost of Youth Incarceration*. Available at https://justicepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Sticker_Shock_2020.pdf at 7. See also, Weissman, Ananthakrishnan, and Schiraldi, *Moving Beyond Youth Prisons: Lessons from New York City’s Implementation of Close to Home*. Columbia University Justice Lab (February 2019) Available at <https://justicelab.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/Moving%20Beyond%20Youth%20Prisons%20-%20C2H.pdf>

²⁹ Sarah Cusworth Warker and Jerald Herting. The Impact of Pretrial Juvenile Detention on 12 Month Recidivism: A Matched Comparison Study, *Crime & Delinquency* Vol. 66 (13-14), 1865 –1887, 1881. Available at, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/001128720926115> at 1869 (Youth who experienced detention are 16% more likely to be incarcerated as an adult than other justice-involved youth.); see also <https://njdc.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/The-Harms-of-Juvenile-Detention.pdf>

³⁰ See the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s Literature Review regarding “Alternatives to Detention and Confinement,” available at <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/model-programs-guide/literature-reviews/alternatives-to-detection-and-confinement.pdf> (August 2014) at 1-2:

Given the detriment to public safety and the harm inflicted upon individual youth, incarceration of youth should only be used as a last resort. Notably, the American Academy of Pediatrics recently made exactly this point.³¹ Clearly, we need more alternatives to detention, incarceration, and placement in New York City to ensure that all youth are given this essential opportunity.

NYC Lacks Adequate Appropriate ATDs, ATIs, and ATPs.

Our staff of attorneys and social workers routinely diligently look for Alternative Programs which meet client needs and have available space. Unfortunately, the lack of space in appropriate programs poses a significant challenge. This dearth of appropriate programs can result in youth spending unnecessary time in detention and negatively affect their rehabilitation.

Home-Based Alternative Programs: Home-based Alternative Programs involve therapeutic services provided to youth and families in their homes. One important feature of these programs is the availability of therapists who regularly go to clients' homes to provide individual and family therapy, as well as drug counseling. Many youth in need of these programs have mental health diagnoses requiring therapeutic treatment, and thus home-based interventions assist favorable outcomes and provide intensive support. However, our staff regularly report a shortage

“...[R]esearch has demonstrated that detention and confinement facilities negatively affect a child’s mental state, academic aptitude, and employment prospects. Placing a juvenile in secure facilities hinders the juvenile’s developmental process, leads to depression, and increases the risk of suicide or other self-harm [citation omitted]. Placed in detention or a confinement facility, the juvenile is cut off from conventional opportunities for growth, and any positive ties he or she may have had in the community are severed [citation omitted]. In addition, researchers have found that more than 40 percent of juveniles in secure facilities suffer from at least one learning disability [citation omitted]... Finally, as a result of their period of incarceration, detained juveniles typically receive lower wages and experience greater difficulty finding employment compared with their peers [citation omitted].”

³¹ See <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/juvenile-justice/protect-children-reform-the-juvenile-justice-system/>

of available home-based alternative programs, leading to unnecessarily long stays in detention and a lack of adequate supports in the community.³²

Community-Based Alternative Programs: Community-based Alternative Programs require youth to travel to participate in programming in the community. Our attorneys and social workers routinely advocate for the use of such programs for clients. However, depending upon the demands of the prosecutor and/or judge, our staff often struggle to find suitable available programs. Our staff report the following limitations in available Alternative Programs:

- ***Duration:*** Many prosecutors and judges demand longer-term programming than is available, requiring defense attorneys to cobble together more than one program to satisfy their demands. Many programs are time-limited to six months or less. This duration may be based upon evidentiary research supporting the specific program model. If so, such information should be shared with stakeholders to support the sufficiency of a single program. If not, longer programs should be developed to satisfy all stakeholders.
- ***Age limitations:*** Many programs are for youth aged 16 and above, and therefore do not serve youth charged as juvenile offenders, who are 13 to 15.
- ***Long waiting lists:*** Some programs have long waiting lists due to limited space and program staff. This is especially true if the client and/or family members need a Spanish-speaking case worker or therapist.
- ***More programming needed in Staten Island:*** Richmond County youth do not have the same access to services in their home borough. Traveling out of Staten Island to participate

³² One issue with the Juvenile Justice Initiative (JJI), a home-based ATP, is that it will not accept a youth if they have a second open case. However, some clients need ATPs specifically because they face imminent placement as a result of a second case.

in programs and services creates a wide range of safety and educational issues that do not exist for other youth.

Alternative to Placement Programs: We also want to highlight the need for additional ATP programs for youth in the dispositional phase of juvenile delinquency cases (disposition is akin to “sentencing”). Unfortunately, the recent closing of the effective Esperanza program which served both as an ATP in Family Court and an ATI in the Youth Part has been a tremendous loss for clients in NYC. Esperanza provided an intensive, therapeutic, community-based program which also contained a trauma-driven therapeutic component addressing the needs of youth with a trauma history. The contract with its proposed replacement, CASES IMPACT, was reportedly cancelled and no substitute has been provided. The City must move quickly to fill this critical gap in programming.

Access to Employment Opportunities and Educational Specialists.

All programs – whether voluntary preventive programs or Alternative Programs - need to provide more access to employment services and to paid work, as these are most effective in our experience. For example, one alternative program that helps with jobs is Exalt, but once Exalt ends, the client often finds themselves with a resume but few, if any, job prospects. As such, the City should expand the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) to function year-round, with the City and/or its partners providing paid work to participating youth. Expanding SYEP to a year-round jobs program would be an excellent preventative service for at-risk and justice-involved youth.³³ The Citizen’s Committee for Children indicated in 2017 several ways to strengthen SYEP, all of which remain relevant today, including more specific models based on age, a year-round

³³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/12/08/one-cheap-way-to-curb-crime-give-teens-a-summer-job/>

program for older youth, focus on connecting youth to real-world job experiences, funding an increase in capacity to service more youth, and increasing the per participant payment rate.³⁴

Programs also need to have educational specialists. A primary issue is that many court-involved youth have to switch schools due to safety concerns, yet judges and prosecutors also require proof of school attendance. Given the above, these transfers need to happen quickly. Dedicated program personnel to assist the parent/guardian navigate educational system issues would be helpful. The Legal Aid Society's Educational Advocacy Project can assist but has limited capacity.

Educational and Job Training Opportunities Keep Youth Out of the Legal System.

To prevent further entrenchment of youth in the legal system, the City should invest in access to college preparatory programming and vocational training for court-impacted youth. While education is a predictor of lower rates of recidivism, involvement with the youth detention system is a predictor of higher rates of involvement with the adult criminal system.

The Legal Aid Society applauds the recent effort by Passages Academy at the Horizon secure detention facility, which held a college week for students in May. Passages reports that students left the week eager to learn more about higher education opportunities.³⁵ However, such programming is not a regular occurrence. Exposure to higher educational opportunities, both college and vocational, is vital to ensuring the long-term ability of at-risk and also court-impacted youth to live, learn, and earn in their communities.

³⁴ See <https://ccnynyork.org/data-publications/testimony-oversight-oversight-summer-youth-employment-program/>

³⁵ See *Passages Post*, Passages Academy [May 2023] available at <https://4.files.edl.io/9b87/06/05/23/133814-2a303f04-335c-4391-98f1-ca42134d17fa.pdf> at 10.

Access to higher education can be transformational for justice-impacted persons. Most significantly, education is proven to reduce the likelihood of recidivism.³⁶ Incarcerated people who participate in postsecondary education programs are 48% less likely to recidivate than those who do not.³⁷ For example, here in New York, the highly successful Bard Prison Initiative and Hudson Link each boast a recidivism rate of less than 4% for their graduates.³⁸ Education is key to ensuring that people impacted by the justice system do not reoffend, but instead become productive members of society.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for holding this hearing to address these important topics relating to the need for more preventative services and alternative programs. We look forward to continuing to work with the City Council and are happy to answer any questions you have.

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³⁶ Lois M. Davis et al., *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults*, RAND Corp. [2013], available at https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html.

³⁷ Robert Bozick, Jennifer Steele, Lois Davis & Susan Turner, *Does Providing Inmates with Education Improve Postrelease Outcomes? A Meta-analysis of Correctional Education Programs in the United States*, 14 J. of Experimental Criminology 389 [May 24, 2018], available at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11292-018-9334-6>.

³⁸ Hayne Yoon, *Back to School: A Common-Sense Strategy to Lower Recidivism*, Vera Institute [Sept. 19, 2019], available at <https://www.vera.org/news/back-to-school-a-common-sense-strategy-to-lower-recidivism>.



December 14, 2024

Chairs Ayala and Stevens,

My name is Bishop Mitchell Taylor and I am attending today's hearing to outline a comprehensive outreach and service model that has the capacity to prevent youth in our City's most disadvantaged neighborhoods from becoming trapped in cycles of violence and the justice system. The core tenants of this model are as follows: viable and supportive pathways to success, credible messengers, and community support for success.

Growing up in the Queensbridge Houses- the nation's largest public housing development- and in my 30+ years as a pastor for residents of Western Queens, I have seen the effects of violence and justice system involvement on lower income black and brown communities. 19 years ago, I co-founded an organization called the East River Development Alliance, now known as Urban Upbound, to scale-up and operationalize successful strategies and support systems that- despite the odds- exist organically in public housing communities.

The first pillar of this model, viable and supportive pathways to success, involves offering youth in our communities a comprehensive suite of services, giving them the tools they need to overcome any and all of the pre-determinants to involvement in violence and the justice system. At Urban Upbound, our services include workforce & career development, one-on-one financial & housing counseling, youth & academic development & college access, worker cooperative development & small business support, tax preparation & benefits access, mental health counseling, and banking inclusion through the Urban Upbound Federal Credit Union. We cannot expect our most at-risk youth to pursue higher education or vocational careers, to think about credit scores and savings plans, all while ignoring the violence around them, unless we outline and guide them step by step to a vision of career, financial, and personal success that they can believe in.

The second pillar of this model, credible messengers, hinges on community outreach and engagement conducted by credible messengers. Outreach staff are credible when they come from the same communities they are conducting outreach to, and struggle with the same conditions and barriers that their friends and neighbors do. This model necessitates that outreach staff, often youth themselves, be given the time and space to participate in the same programs that they are pitching to their fellow community members. This model does not work unless outreach staff believe in the programs they are promoting. At Urban Upbound, we encourage our outreach staff, each of whom are credible messengers, to pursue greater career heights elsewhere; the stories of their successes are worth more than a hundred hours of



URBAN UPBOUND

tackling poverty, changing lives.

flyering and tabling. Furthermore, when community organizers, Resident Associations, nonprofit organizations, and faith leaders come together to promote a growing number of success stories, both big and small, and collectively support our youth in their career, financial, and personal development journeys, that is called community support for success. This neighborhood buy-in is key in disadvantaged neighborhoods where for many, community is all they can rely on.

I want to take the time to thank Urban Upbound's partners in government who have supported the opening of Urban Upbound offices and pop-up spaces in the districts they represent. I welcome any and all of you to join me, at Urban Upbound's multi-building campus in and around the Queensbridge Houses, for a discussion about Urban Upbound's model of serving and supporting at-risk youth.

Thank you Speaker Adams, Deputy Speaker and General Welfare Chair Ayala, Youth Services Chair Stevens, and participating Council Members for holding today's important hearing and for hearing my testimony.

Bishop Mitchell Taylor
Co-Founder & CEO
Urban Upbound



URBAN UPBOUND

tackling poverty, changing lives.

New York City Council
Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare
Oversight: Preventative Services for At-Risk and Justice Involved Youth
Written Comments of Kate Rubin, Director of Policy, Youth Represent
December 14, 2023

Youth Represent is dedicated to improving the lives and futures of young people affected by the criminal legal system. We provide criminal and civil reentry legal representation to young people age 16-26, assisting them with everything from rap sheet 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 and by leading the statewide campaign for the Youth Justice & Opportunities Act, legislation that would transform New York's youth justice system by expanding alternatives to incarceration and immediate record sealing for adolescents and emerging adults up to age 25.

Thank you to Deputy Speaker Ayala, Chair Stevens, committee members and staff for providing the opportunity for some of our Youth Represent Youth Committee members, along with other young people from across the city, to provide testimony on preventative Services for At-Risk and Justice Involved Youth at the hearing on December 14th, and for accepting this written testimony.

The Mayor's Budget Priorities and Policies Are Harming Young People and Families.

As you have heard from young people again and again, a robust network of high quality, youth-centered services is essential for preventing youth arrests and for successfully diverting young people from the legal system post-arrest.

In FY 2023, there were 1,775 admissions of young people to secure detention, a tremendous increase from FY 2021, when there were 987 admissions.¹ The average daily population in Crossroads and Horizon, the City's secure detention centers, was 233 in FY 2023, requiring the City to request a rare temporary waiver from the Office of Children & Family Services (OCFS) allowing them to house children in "dormitory style" housing, bypassing state law that requires that every young person in detention have a single bed in their own room.² Over the past months there have been reports of young people sleeping in hallways, classrooms, and even counsel interview rooms.

While multiple factors have driven this increase, including a citywide increase in shootings among adults *and* youth in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic,³ **the current levels of detention and overcrowding were avoidable, and are a result of specific budget and policy decisions made by the Adams administration.** These include:

¹ 2023 Mayor's Management Report (Sept. 2023), p. 232.

(https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2023/2023_mmr.pdf).

² Bahar Ostadan and Jessy Edwards (Nov 6, 2023). *Teens in NYC detention centers are sleeping on the ground due to overcrowding, staff say*. Gothamist. <https://gothamist.com/news/teens-in-nyc-detention-centers-are-sleeping-on-the-ground-due-to-overcrowding-staff-say>

³ Butts, Jeffrey A., Sheyla A. Delgado, and Richard A. Espinobarros (2023). *Minor Role: Youth Under Age 18 and New York City Violence*. [JohnJayREC DataBit 2023-1]. New York, NY: Research and Evaluation Center, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.

- Ending the contract for Esperanza to provide individual and family therapy and intensive case management as an alternative to detention for youth age 18 and under, and failing to transfer that contract to another organization.
- Cutting funds to the Next STEPS program, which provided credible messenger mentoring to over 200 young people in NYCHA developments. In independent evaluations, credible messenger mentoring for youth has been shown to reduce felony re-conviction rates by 57% after 2 years.⁴
- Ramping up racially biased quality of life policing, with the NYPD issuing more than double the number of criminal summonses in 2022 than they did in 2019,⁵ and making more stops in 2022 than they had since 2015.⁶

Further cuts to core services, including libraries and schools, proposed by the Mayor’s budget office in November – and the two more rounds of cuts projected – reflect a continuation of these misguided priorities and a profound failure to serve and protect children and families. We appreciate the Council’s allyship pushing back on these harmful cuts and affirming that it is the duty of New York City’s government to provide essential public services.

While life-saving services have faced five rounds of cuts under this Mayor, the NYPD has been given preferential treatment and it has already been reported that NYPD will likely be spared from additional cuts in January. Even with the latest round of cuts, the NYPD budget is still projected to increase in the current fiscal year by close to \$135M (at least 2.3%). While the administration has tried to scare New Yorkers by claiming that any decrease in the police budget will increase violence in communities, there is no evidence that increasing an already bloated police force will decrease safety – while there is significant research and evidence that safety requires deep investments in core infrastructure and services like affordable housing, childcare, healthcare, public transportation and youth programs. The safest communities are communities where basic needs are met and where young people and families are resourced to thrive – not where there are more police.

Programming and services provided by nonprofit organizations have already been reduced as a result of the cuts announced in November. The additional 5% planned cuts in January would be detrimental to the continued running of these community programs. Organizations like Youth Represent touch every vital aspect of daily life - from public education, health and human services, cultural enrichment to language access. We call on the City to partner with the nonprofit sector and work toward creative solutions - not hinder us further. The City cannot withstand a 15% cut to its budget, and any additional cuts to the nonprofit sector will only undermine the health and public safety of New York City.

New York City Must Invest in Young People’s Futures, Not Their Criminalization

The city must divest from systems that surveil, police, arrest, and incarcerate young people. Instead, we must make sustained investments in the things that are the foundation of genuine safety: housing, education, green spaces, healthcare, accessible transportation, and living wage employment opportunities.

⁴ Matthew Lynch, et. al., Urban Institute Justice Policy Center (Research Report), *Arches Transformative Mentoring Program: An Implementation and Impact Evaluation in New York City*. February 2018. Available: <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/arches-transformative-mentoring-program>.

⁵ Bhat, Suhail (Sept. 12, 2023). *NYPD Quality-of-Life Crackdown Sends Thousands to Criminal Court, Undoing Landmark Reforms*. The City. <https://www.thecity.nyc/2023/09/12/nypd-quality-of-life-crackdown-enforcement-skyrockets-criminal-court/>.

⁶ New York Civil Liberties Union Stop and Frisk Data (<https://www.nyclu.org/en/stop-and-frisk-data>).

This is not only good policy, but also extremely cost effective during a difficult budget year. While we do not have the exact costs of detaining a young person at Crossroads or Horizon, we know that the cost to detain one person at Rikers Island is \$556,539⁷ and that the cost to incarcerate a young person in a New York State juvenile detention center was \$892,206 in 2020.⁸

Rather than continue to pour money into stops, criminal summonses, arrests, and detention of young people, we must expand programs that take a public health approach to gun violence, including violence intervention programs. While New York State has led the nation by investing in these programs, the resources they receive remain a tiny fraction of those received by traditional law enforcement. Violence intervention programs must be funded to expand catchment areas, hire more staff, and create robust intake systems to serve more participants city and statewide.

We must also invest in health, mental health, and well-being for youth and families and in education and economic mobility. This includes:

- Restoring funds for alternative to incarceration programs that include individual and family therapy as well as intensive case management and crisis response capacity.
- Restoring funds for Next STEPS and increasing – not cutting – credible messenger mentoring.
- Investing strategically in education and youth employment training programs that will help place young people and emerging adults in living wage jobs.
- Fully funding legal services which play a key role helping young people overcome barriers to employment and education and maintain stable housing and family connections.
- Partnering with the City's [Center for Innovation Through Data Intelligence](#) to map the ecosystem of services available in the zip codes with the highest admissions to secure detention and the highest rates of Out-of-Work and Out-of-School youth , in order to identify and fill key gaps in education, after school, enrichment, health, mental health, and other preventative programs for young people.
- Establishing population review teams and ensuring that resources are in place in every borough to supervise young people with open family court and supreme court cases in the community instead of secure detention.

Conclusion

Mayor Adams has said that “The goal is not to wait to young people fall in the river of despair and then spend countless number of dollars and hours and missed opportunities, but to go upstream and provide them the services that they deserve.” Yet his budget priorities – and further proposed cuts – do exactly the opposite, cutting effective and relatively inexpensive programs that provide essential supports for young people and families while allowing youth detention to soar. **We thank the Council for your continued partnership** ensuring investment, not criminalization, of young people.

⁷ For FY2021. “NYC Department of Correction, FYs 2011-21 Operating Expenditures.” *New York City Comptroller’s Office, Budget Bureau*. December 2021.

⁸ Justice Policy Institute, *Sticker Shock 2020: The Cost of Youth Incarceration*. July 2020. Available: <https://justicepolicy.org/research/policy-brief-2020-sticker-shock-the-cost-of-youth-incarceration/>

Good day to all of the Committee and Chair,

Hello, my name is Alberto and i'm a graduate of the BronxConnect Program. This program has been very powerful by helping me turn my life around for the better. I'm a clear example of what people can achieve by getting a second chance. BronxConnect should exist all over the world because a lot of youth need programs like this. We should constantly educate and advise young people about life. BronxConnect has changed a lot of young people's lives in the U.S. We all need a second chance and BronxConnect is here to help.

Thank You to the Chair and Committee for allowing me to express my thoughts on this important issue.

Hello Chair and Committee,

My name is Ariella Armoogan and I'm with the BronxConnect organization.

BronxConnect is a youth justice program that helps with issues in New York. It has helped me do good things for my community and state. The Right To Remain Silent movement is a very important campaign. All minors should have legal representation present when their being interrogated.

Thank you Chair and Committee for allowing me to share.

Good morning Council and Chair

I am Beshon Austin and currently I attend BronxConnect. This program has a lot of benefits for the youth. It can inspire people to do better with their lives. Why destroy something that's proven to keep people out of trouble and out of jail? I am the proof because BronxConnect is helping me to do better and stay focused. Thank you Chair and Committee for your time and for allowing me to share.

MISSION STATEMENT

THE IMAGINE PROJECT Inc., a not for profit 501(c) 3 corporation, dedicated to nurturing a child's creativity through the arts, was founded in 1992 on the principle that there exists within each child a creative energy which must not lie dormant. Rather, this creativity must be channeled to radiate light. For energy misdirected can lead to things far more destructive than darkness. We must create and facilitate a safe environment for children to explore and engage these creative forces. We must encourage and enable them toward the realization of these vast talents and creative abilities. We must help to nurture, develop and when necessary recapture those innate gifts of childhood which so often are lost by the age of ten as children begin to ask: "What if they laugh at me? What if I make a mistake?"

We believe above all else that art has the power to save lives. We have seen this time and again since our inception in 1992. We have nurtured under served children who barely speak; to sing, children who hardly move; to dance, children who never thought it possible, to turn their own ideas into staged works of art with music created by the children themselves. For many children The Imagine Project may be the only place they may ever have to discover that all accomplishments start with a dream, and that all dreams are possible.

"I believe all children are born geniuses. As we grow, most of the wonder is taken away by the day to day realities of life. I have seen over the years that The Imagine Project has the power to bring this magic back into [children's] lives, allowing them to rediscover their own extraordinary potential. The Imagine Project is without question the most beautiful program I have ever experienced."

Dr. Charles DeStefano,
Chief Child Psychologist,
Child Study Center,
NY, NY

Written Testimonial for the benefits of Alternative To Incarceration Programs

My name is Christopher Jeffries and I am 42 years old. Not only am I a person who's been impacted by incarceration, I've also been blessed with the privilege of working with youth in detention centers as well as with youth who have been given the opportunity to attend alternative to incarceration programs. My time as a Youth Development Specialist at ACS allowed me the opportunity to see first hand the differences between the two options. My experience at BronxConnect as a Youth Advocate allows me insight of all of the different opportunities that ATI's can provide. In my opinion, an alternative to incarceration in most cases serves the impacted individual in more better ways than incarceration can. Also, alternatives to incarceration generally produce lower recidivism rates than incarceration does. I also believe that successful alternatives to incarceration not only helps the impacted individual, but it also helps whole families and communities become better by giving people second chances that provide better opportunities.

Most people who are incarcerated are coming home to the same dire situations they were facing before they went in, and they also face discrimination due to their criminal background, which makes it harder for them to achieve the success they need to be a productive member of society. As I've previously stated, alternatives to incarceration provide way more opportunities which in return, have the ability to produce better results than detention and or incarceration. I'd like to thank Chair Rivera and the entire council for allowing me the platform to speak.

Good day Committee and Chair,

My name is David Jenkins and I am currently a client at BronxConnect.

This program is helping me become a better person. BronxConnect is helping me accomplish things that I thought I wouldn't be able to achieve and keeping me out of trouble.

I want to discuss the fact that we need funding. We need all of the beneficial things that this program has to benefit their participants. ATI's are the solution to mass incarceration. These programs give people the opportunity to have a second chance when they make mistakes.

Thank you Chair and Committee for your time.

Great day Chair and Committee,

My name is Ethan Lopez and I represent BronxConnect as a client currently enrolled in the ATI program. BronxConnect is a program that can really change someone's life if they're in trouble with the law. They help you focus on your future by helping you stay on track. Police harassment is causing people to not trust the cops and sever the relationships between officers and community members. Also, police are constantly stopping and searching people unlawfully without their consent. Hopefully, we can have a meeting with the City Council and NYPD to talk about the rates of police harassing black and brown people so we can come to a solution. Thank you Chair and Committee for your time and patience.

Beautiful day Committee and Chair,

My name is Isaiah and I'm a client at the best ATI program there is and that's BronxConnect. This program has helped me become a better father and person all around. The reason why youth need programs like this is because BronxConnect better people like myself or younger. We need money. We can't help people if we don't have the proper funding to pay the staff who help and educate the youth.

Thank you Chair and Committee for considering my thoughts.

Greetings and well wishes to the Chair and Committee,

My name is Jaden Marrero and the organization I'm from is called BronxConnect.

The program I'm involved in comes with great benefits like getting your OSHA certification and driver's license just to name a few. It's important to the community to have a program like this because it helps by keeping kids out of trouble. A possible solution to our problems is educating people of their rights, and having budgets in the city to contribute to alternatives to incarceration instead of sending more people to jail.

Thank you to the Chair and all of the Committee for taking the time to read this.

Good day Chair and Committee,

My name is Jason Moore and I'm currently a client at BronxConnect.

I love the trades, jobs, and different opportunities that BronxConnect has to offer to their participants. BronxConnect is the best program that is present. I love it here and hopefully they can help me beat my case. My community needs more jobs, programs, and community centers to give youth more opportunities for growth. I feel like if people of the community educate themselves about the process of politics and how it affects our lives, we'll be able to take proper actions and hold politicians and lawmakers accountable. Thank you to the Chair and Committee for taking time to read my thoughts.

Good day Chair and entire Committee,

My name is Linda Smith and I'm a part of the Youth Council at BronxConnect.

BronxConnect is a great program. We help youth in our community by rallying and campaigning for our Right To Remain Silent bill and advocating for youthful offenders. ATI's such as ours help young people by helping them get second chances by helping them make positive changes in their lives. We need more programs like ours to teach and educate youth about their rights.

Thank you Chair and Committee for reading my opinions on the matter.

Good morning Committee and Chair,

My name is Luciano Pino. I'm 17 and I'm representing BronxConnect.

In BronxConnect we have people of all ages coming to the program to do workshops, group therapy meetings, and academics after being incarcerated. Most participants are court mandated. ATI's are important because they help people who were incarcerated to come out of detention to get a second chance to do good and focus on what is right. Mayor Adams wants to put a stop to ATI's. We can take people who were arrested for non-violent crimes and let them get time served in an ATI program to get a second chance, and more mental health programs for ATI's. We need more continuous funding for ATI programs. In closing, I just want people like me to be able to have accessibility to a second chance at life and do right.

Thank you Chair and Committee for your time and patience.

**Testimony to the City Council Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare
Oversight Hearing on Preventative Services for At-Risk and Justice Involved Youth
Submitted by Peggy Herrera**

December 14, 2023

Thank you, Chair Stevens and Chair Ayala for holding a hearing on preventative services for at-risk and justice involved youth. My name is Peggy Herrera, and I'm a member of Freedom Agenda.

This is an issue of great importance to me. I have decades of experience working as a counselor with court-involved youth, in limited secure placements and group homes. I am also the mother of a young man who struggled with mental health and trauma after the death of his father, and who was targeted by and caught up in the criminal punishment system before his life was tragically ended by gun violence last year.

Over the years, I have worked with many young people, including my own son, who have previously been in Crossroads, Horizon, or even Rikers. I can say without a doubt that they are not getting any of the attention, resources, or support they need in those settings. How can our city put young people in conditions that further traumatize them, and then expect them to come out and do better? When they come to us from the juvenile detention centers, we have to undo so much harm. I remember a young man coming to us saying "I'm a criminal, I should be on Rikers." The only thing he learned in those settings was how to make a weapon. But in his time with us, he's learned real life skills. I've watched him be able to navigate through frustrating situations where he wanted to respond with violence, but told me instead "I'm using my skills." When he leaves our group home, he wants to do music, and he's excited about this future.

Even when they have done wrong, these kids are worth investing in. We can do that when they are in smaller programs where they can truly build relationships. But there is much more we could be doing and should be doing to get them the resources they need, to keep them safe and well in their communities before they ever interact with police or courts.

What they need is not that complicated. They need quality mental health curriculum and counselors in their schools. They need safe places to be at. They need access to good jobs, including the option to learn a trade. We also need to support families and parents. So often I see that kids who get into trouble are the kids who are living in poverty. They might start skipping school because they don't have what others have, and they're struggling with not being accepted, and maybe being afraid of being bullied. If they find someone who can offer them food, money, or protection, they get caught up. Instead of arresting them and funneling them into this juvenile detention to prison pipeline, can our city just finally commit to make sure all of our kids have the resources and opportunities they deserve? In a city as wealthy as ours, where money seems to fall out of the sky whenever police or jail guards ask for it, we have the resources to do it, we just have to act like the lives of all kids matter. We need money to magically show up to meet their needs too!

The Mayor seems set on undoing so much of the progress we made to keep kids out of juvenile detention, and we need the strong support of the City Council to fight for the resources they need and deserve.

Thank you,
Peggy Herrera

Good morning Chair and Committee,

My name is Robert McKelvin and I'm a BronxConnect Participant. This program is not only telling me why I should leave the street life alone, but it's also giving me the tools to do so. Rikers Island is failing at rehabilitating the people who serve time there and they should close it down as soon as possible. The city should support more kids by offering more jobs, programs, and services instead of cutting them out of the city budget. Thank you Chair and Committee for letting me speak my mind.

Sexual deviants used to sexually harass people who have wonderful lives and families are being misdiagnosed Munchausen by proxy. They put people in unwanted shared living with manufactured conflicts for obvious religious freedom violation of judeo-christianity. They try to steal people's intellectual property designs etc. By Munchausen by proxy. Theft by Munchausen by proxy. Judeo-christians are responsible for most of the creative ideas some are young and needlessly homeless to steal their possessions innovations inventions and ideas. They place jews and christians in scenarios they know violate their religious freedom and beliefs in bible like homosexuality in living situation is forbidden. It's intentional and criminal.

**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: Khameel Terry

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: 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: December 14, 2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Suekanya Mearks

Address: [redacted] 231st [redacted] NY 112413

I represent: Queens (building community centers to

Address: _____

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

Sauve Tamara, CA

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Preventative services

Date: 12/14/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: John Pineda Rodriguez Flores

Address: [Redacted] Jerome Ave, Bronx, NY

I represent: District 16 & CMSP 327

Address: 1501 Jerome Ave, Bronx, NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Preventative
services

Date: 12/14/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Abby Eyford

Address: [Redacted] Jerome Ave, Bronx, NY

I represent: District 16 - Youth & Family Council

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

of preventative services
for at risk youth & justice involved youth

Date: 12/14/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ali Sibani

Address: [Redacted] Jerome Ave [Redacted]

I represent: YJEN (non-profit)

Address: 1525 Jerome Ave, 10452

**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: Jamel Burgess

Address: 581 Seventh Ave

I represent: Carnegie Hall

Address: 881 Seventh Ave

**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: 12/14/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: BATTMAN WHO-2 HUGHS

Address: N/A

I represent: Youth Represent NYC & WARRIOR
FACES

Address: 11 Rock Place NY & BRONX
CONNECT

**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: David Freudenthal

Address: [Redacted] CPS, NY, NY

I represent: Carnegie Hall

Address: 881 Seventh Ave, NY 10019

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: 12/14/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Star Fernandez

Address: [redacted] De Sales place

I represent: The Bronx Defenders

Address: 360 E 161st

**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: Michal Gross

Address: 317 Malcolm x Blvd, 10th Floor

I represent: Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem

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: Caitlyn Passaretti

Address: [redacted] convent ave

I represent: Citizens Committee for Children

Address: 14 wall St

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jackie Shelton - Brooklyn Defender

Address: Services

I represent: BDS

Address: Brooklyn

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/14/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lauren Galloway

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 12-14-2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jessica Vinson

Address: 432 E 149th

I represent: Bronx Connect

Address: 432 E 149th Bronx NY

**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: 12/14/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rev. Wendy Calderon Payne

Address: 432 E 149th St

I represent: Bronx Connect (Urban Youth Alliance)

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: Ramon Caba

Address: 630 JACOBSON AVE BRONX, NY 10455

I represent: Bronx Community Justice Center

Address: 630 JACOBSON AVE BRONX, NY 10455

**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: Sherliselu Vining

Address: [Redacted] Jackson

I represent: Bronx C

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: Cherman Ingkarn

Address: [redacted] Jackson Ave.

I represent: Grand Community Justice 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: Christopher Maspons

Address: [redacted] Concord Ave

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: 12/14/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tawaki Kanda

Address: _____

I represent: Self

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: 12/14/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Raymond Toomer

Address: Associate Commissioner, Community Based Alternatives

I represent: Administrator for Children's 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: 12/14/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Johan Peguero

Address: Associate Commissioner, Close to Home and non-secure detention

I represent: Administration for Children's 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: ~~Lee~~ Deputy Comm Rattray

Address: _____

I represent: Dy CD

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Karina Christensen

Address: _____

I represent: D4CD - OUS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 12/11/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Stephanie Gendell

Address: Deputy Commissioner, External Affairs

I represent: Administration for Children's Services

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rh. Xenia Rivera

Address: 488 E. 164th Street BX NY

I represent: Housing Solutions of NY

Address: Same as above

**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: 12.14.23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jason Gordon

Address: 4 West 125th Street

I represent: the Aces Program (CAsEs)

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: Aaliyah Guillory-Nichens

Address: 11 Park Place Suite 1512 New York, NY 10007

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: 12/14/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JULIA DAVIS - Children's Defense Fund

Address: 815 2nd Ave, 8th Floor NY NY 10017

I represent: Children's Defense Fund - NY

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: Mona Smith

Address: [Redacted] Fulton St, Brooklyn

I represent: S.J.I. - Society's Justice, Innovation & Integrity

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: 12/14/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alli Sibelle

Address: [Redacted] MONROE AVE [Redacted]

I represent: YMEN

Address: 1525 Jerome Ave, 10452

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