



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES
MAY 10, 2023**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. Thank you to Chair Althea Stevens and the members of the Committee on Youth Services for holding this hearing today.

In FY23, the administration increased the number of slots for SYEP to a record 100,000. This program, however, excluded undocumented youth and young people from participation. Last year, I introduced Intro 0188-2022, which would require DYCD to fill this gap, and the need for employment opportunities for undocumented young people has only increased since.

Governor Hochul intends to allocate about \$1.1 billion in support of the more than 57,000 of asylum-seekers who have arrived in the city in the last year. While most of that funding is dedicated to covering a share of the city's costs for opening shelters and emergency response centers, the Adams Administration has an opportunity to invest in workforce development and employment readiness programs so the city's new arrivals can contribute to the economy and integrate into communities. While we do not know for sure how many undocumented youth and young people there are in NYC, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs estimates that 42,000 young people ages 18 to 24 are undocumented, plus another 45,000 under age 17. With the influx of asylum-seekers into NYC, the number of young people who are not eligible for SYEP is even higher now. Last year, DYCD and the DOE partnered to offer a pilot internship program for youth ages 14-21 regardless of their immigration status. In total, 282 young people were enrolled in the program, where they received a stipend of up to \$552, and engaged in project-based learning and work-readiness training for a maximum of 60 hours.¹ DYCD says it plans to run the program again this year, expanded to reach 600 students. At a cost of about \$1,400 per participant, this program is relatively inexpensive, and the city should expand beyond the 600 anticipated slots. The preliminary budget for FY 2024 also fails to fund some key initiatives funded in the FY 2023 adopted budget, including \$11 million for SYEP Metro Cards and \$9.7 million for Work, Learn, Grow, which offers public school students ages 16 to 19 academic support and job readiness training. The FY 2024 budget should at a minimum fulfill these previous funding allocations.

1

<https://citylimits.org/2023/03/10/city-to-offer-alternative-summer-career-program-open-to-undocumented-youth/>

DYCD also operates homeless shelters specifically for runaway and homeless youth (RHY), which offer specialized counseling, and education and job training for young people ages 16-24. However, youth and young adults are increasingly turning to the city's Department of Homeless Services-run adult shelters because youth shelters do not have room. Since 2021, the number of youth shelter beds has decreased, while the need has increased with the number of unaccompanied young asylum-seekers arriving in NYC in the last several months. Just last month, Sheltering Arms, a 200-year-old nonprofit serving 17,000 children and families, announced it will be shutting down. Sheltering Arms contracted with DYCD to provide youth homeless shelters, and cited a delay in payments from the city as a primary cause of their decision to close. This came on the heels of the Adams Administration's order to drop-in center providers to prohibit the young people who come in for services from sleeping in their facilities, which has been criticized by providers, advocates, and directly impacted people as inhumane. As NYC is in an unprecedented housing crisis, funding shelter and homeless services needs to be a priority.

A lauded program that was never actually funded by the previous administration, is addressing homelessness for TGNCNBI+ and LGB youth. NYC can work to help protect young people most vulnerable to homelessness and exploitation for basic necessities... This administration should also commit to establishing housing vouchers for LGBTQ+ youth, a service proposed by the de Blasio administration but never actualized. TGNCNBI youths' needs have historically been neglected based on the City's past budgets. Even though there has been an increasing gap of homelessness, poverty, and pipeline to incarceration for those within the TGNCNBI community, the budget does not equally increase to reduce these gaps. Funding in the amount of \$1.25 million would provide the means to launch a housing voucher/rental assistance program catered to LGBTQ+ homeless youth under 24. This initiative is a partnership between the city and the Ali Forney Center; with additional funding, the city could also assist LGBTQ+ adults ages 25-30 by partnering with other organizations that provide housing services such as Destination Tomorrow, Princess Janae Place, and GLITS.

Young people are the future of our city, and this budget should be a celebration of the resiliency they have shown over the course of this pandemic. I look forward to working with this administration and this council to ensure that we are prioritizing and supporting youth and young adults.

Thank you.