



**Melissa Hester
Interim Commissioner
Administration for Children's Services**

**Testimony to the New York City Council
Children and Youth Committee**

March 16, 2026

Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget

Good morning. My name is Melissa Hester, and I am the Interim Commissioner at the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). I am joined today by Winette Saunders, the First Deputy Commissioner; Margaret Pletnikoff, the Deputy Commissioner for Financial Services; and Stephanie Gendell the Deputy Commissioner for External Affairs; Nancy Ginsburg, the Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Youth and Family Justice; Luisa Linares, the Deputy Commissioner for the Family Services Division; Ina Mendez, the Deputy Commissioner for Family Permanency Services; and Elizabeth Wolkomir, the Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Child and Family Well-being, are here and available for questions. I am also joined by the full ACS Cabinet and many of the senior leaders who lead ACS's work and helped us prepare for today's hearing.

Thank you Chair Stevens and members of the Children and Youth Committee for holding today's hearing on our Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you the important work that ACS is doing to keep children safe, and to provide support to children, youth and families. I also want to take a moment to thank the ACS team and our provider agency partners for their commitment, compassion and dedication to this important work. As you will hear more about today, our Preliminary Budget Plan includes important actions to help ACS build on our accomplishments and continue to move this important work forward.

Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)

Child care is a critical support for families, and we are thrilled that the Mamdani Administration is committed to strengthening and expanding the City's early childhood

system so that families across the city will have access to high quality, affordable child care.

Starting in 2022, ACS spearheaded an effort to substantially increase the number of children enrolled in child care with costs paid fully or mostly by an ACS-issued child care voucher. In 2022, approximately 7,500 low-income children were enrolled with an ACS-issued voucher and today approximately 71,000 children are enrolled.

As the Council and advocates will surely recall, at this time last year, the state had not committed to maintaining funding for these vouchers; we faced a billion dollar deficit and the prospect of thousands of families losing their child care vouchers. ACS is grateful to the City Council, as well as the advocates, for your invaluable partnership in advocating for additional state support for the child care assistance program (CCAP). Thankfully, this joint advocacy helped us receive additional state support so that ACS has been able to continue to recertify the vast majority of eligible families, allowing families to maintain this critical support.

We are encouraged by the additional CCAP funding in this year's state Executive Budget. Based on the City's analysis, the Governor's budget would allow us to continue our current policy of providing continuity of care for most low-income families and support the growing need among families on cash assistance served by the Human Resources Administration (HRA). While the current funding wouldn't immediately allow us to begin offering care to children on the voucher waitlist, we will continue to regularly assess enrollment across ACS, NYCPS, and HRA to see when this may be possible.

The City's FY 2027 Preliminary Budget includes \$1.1 million, when fully implemented, for 10 new staff to bolster our ability to maintain program integrity and compliance, safeguarding the over \$1 billion in federal and state aid for CCAP, as the child care system continues to grow.

Supporting Families and Communities

Supporting and uplifting families and communities so they have the resources, information, and services they need to thrive, is critical to our mission. We want families to get the resources and connections they need to foster healthy child development and relationships and so there is never the need for child protection involvement. Our prevention providers, Community Partnerships, Family Enrichment Centers, and Office of Child Safety and Injury Prevention, do this in every community of the City each and every day.

We have now completed our plan to expand from three to thirty Family Enrichment Centers (FECs), with the contract for the 30th FEC getting registered in January. FECs are welcoming walk-in family-centered spaces, open to all community members. Everything from the name, the furniture and the offerings are co-designed with families. These spaces are intended to enhance family and child well-being by promoting "protective factors", such as resilience and social connection. The 30 FECs are in various stages of implementation and are all now engaging families and neighbors in their respective communities.

We have also been intentional about our efforts to ensure that families in need are able to access services and supports, through ACS or other non-profit community-based providers.

We are continuing to collaborate with our sister agencies, including NYCPS, DHS, DYCD, and Health & Hospitals to both get the word out about the Support Line and ensure that they know how to access services for families without the need to make a report to the Statewide Central Register (SCR). We have trained over 27,000 mandated reporters across schools, shelters, hospitals and afterschool programs. As a result, we have seen a steady reduction in the number of reports from those we have trained: down 16% for education and child care reporters; down 16% from social service agencies and down 7% by health personnel.

In November 2023, we launched a Support Line staffed by MSWs, whose sole purpose is to connect callers to the resources they need. The Support Line now receives an average of over 300 inquiries each month, and I encourage you to share this resource with your constituents (the phone number is 212-676-7667).

With the aid of our Support Line and our collaboration with our prevention provider partners, we have also focused on increasing community referrals to prevention, so families can get connected to supportive services that help them address difficult challenges so that they and their children can thrive. We see these efforts working, with new enrollments in prevention up nearly 10% last year, and community referrals increasing from 12% of prevention referrals in January 2023 to 25% in January 2026.

Earlier this month, ACS, along with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and Deputy Mayor Arteaga, announced Strong Foundations, our new collaboration with DOHMH, for which you see the intracity transfer from ACS to DOHMH. This program funded at approximately \$20.1 million over three years, with \$19.2 million from ACS, will enable DOHMH to expand programs that support new parents and their children, reaching more families in the community. Specifically, the funding will support: 1) expanded eligibility for Nurse Family Partnership (called NFPx), to include late registrants (pregnant people in their 3rd trimester up to the birth of the child and people with previous live births Nurse Family Partnership- populations typically not eligible for the program); 2) expanded capacity in the perinatal and early childhood mental health clinics to serve more families and offer additional clinical, peer and material supports; and 3) expanded trainings, funding perinatal mental health certification and establishing a 3-year fellowship to develop a pipeline of staff with perinatal and early childhood knowledge and skills to support families with young children.

Building and Sustaining a Culture of Safety

There is no mission more important than keeping children safe from harm—and this remains our north star. For ACS, safety means protecting children from the harms of abuse and neglect, as well as from the harms of avoidable separation from their families.

At the same time as we are working to reduce unnecessary reports, if a child is not safe, calls are warranted and we need to be sure that our child protective staff have

the tools and skills needed to identify those children truly in danger and to connect families to services and supports, and foster care if necessary, so children can be safe. The average child protective caseload is currently 7.6, which is well below national standards and greatly strengthens the capacity of our child protective teams, who do their work with all the skill, compassion, teamwork and professionalism for which they are trained and supported. In January, we launched our new Clinical Support Program for child protection, which provides our teams with licensed professionals who have expertise in mental health, substance abuse and intimate partner violence. Through the newly enhanced program, these experts add critical insight to our work and can engage directly with families to offer hands-on support and connections to services specific to each family's needs.

Earlier this month, we launched a new citywide child safety campaign to get the word out to parents and caregivers about keeping children safe from preventable injuries. These messages include how to put children to bed safely, how to store toxic household products, and the importance of window guards, especially as we head into nicer weather. We hope that you can share these messages on your social media pages too. We have included sample images at the end of this testimony.

Providing the Highest Quality Care and Support at the Children's Center and For Children and Youth in Foster Care

The number of children in foster care has continued to decline each year. At the end of 2025, there were 6,292 children in foster care, down from nearly 6,400 at the end of 2024 and over 7,500 just five years ago. We have also seen the number of children

at the Nicholas Scoppetta Children's Center decline to an average of 61 children in FY2025 compared to 74 in FY2024.

While the numbers of children at the Children's Center and in foster care continue to decline, it remains critical that we provide the highest quality care and support the children in our care.

Over the past year, we have further enhanced our policies, protocols and staff trainings to further support a safe and trauma-informed environment for youth residing at the Children's Center. This work has included physical changes including a restructured entrance area to include more modernized security equipment, an additional medical triage operation to support more timely medical clearances at admission, a new bedroom sleeping area for younger teen girls (e.g. 13 year olds) separate from older teens; and a paint/furniture/decoration color scheme that is more trauma-informed. In the coming months, we will be launching a new allowance program for youth ages 13 and older who are residing at the Children's Center and opening a new Music Studio.

The FY27 Preliminary Budget includes additional support for our work at the Children's Center, so that we can maintain a safe and secure site and better meet the needs of youth. Specifically, the Plan includes a baselined amount of \$4 million starting in FY27 for additional Children's Center Staff and Support Services. This includes funding for 13 additional staff including: a behavioral health manager, a deputy director of intake, and additional special officers to provide 24-hour security and support for the facility. The funding also supports expanded chaperone services to ensure youth at the Children's Center can get to and from school regardless of where their home school is,

and other appointments such as visits, court and doctors. In addition, the funding reflects an increase to Medical Consultation Services at Bellevue Hospital to account for collective bargaining adjustments.

The FY27 Preliminary Budget also includes city funding to support the state mandated foster care rates that ACS is required to provide for foster parent stipends, adoption subsidy and KinGAP subsidy. This includes \$215 million in FY26 (which is comprised of \$165 million in the FY27 Preliminary Budget and \$50 million that was added in the November Plan); \$263 million in FY27 and \$313 million baselined starting in FY28. As you may recall, the state increased these rates several years ago, but did not include additional state funding in the foster care block grant. ACS long-supported the higher rates and appreciates the City baselining these funds that the State did not provide.

The New York City foster parents, adoptive parents and relatives who commit through kinship guardianship, open their hearts and homes to children in need and we are so grateful. When children need to come into foster care due to a safety concern, we continue to focus on finding kinship homes, with nearly half of all foster children currently living with relatives or close family friends. We have also focused on increasing the number of foster homes recruited, and thank the Chair for helping to coordinate last year's foster parent recruitment day with Council Members throughout the city. Once children are in foster care, ACS and our providers work diligently with families so that children can return home as quickly as possible, and if that is not possible achieve permanency through adoption or KinGAP.

We are also focused on supporting youth while they are in our care and as they transition to young adults. Last year, the city invested in the Youth Safety and Support Initiative, which enabled us to expand Fair Futures programming to over 5500 youth by FY29, College Choice to over 400 youth and included funding for a new Career Choice program. Recently launched, Career Choice provides support to youth in foster care to attend a vocational or job-readiness training and financial assistance to successfully complete the program as a pathway to independence. Additionally, Career Choice includes an ACS partnership with DYCD Advanced and Earn program. The first youth to join this program are currently seeking their mechanics certifications.

This year, ACS, in partnership with the Center for Fair Futures and the Mayor's Office of Community Health, launched the Soul Care Pilot, a partnership to enhance mental health and wellness for youth ages 13-26. Based on feedback from young people, Soul Care aims to enhance mental health and wellness for youth in foster care by empowering youth to care for their own mental health in ways that resonate with them – taking a writing class, doing pottery, joining a gym, going to dance classes, experiencing the joy of a Broadway show, etc. The Soul Care pilot includes collaboration with five foster care providers and Fair Futures Coaches to provide youth with supportive one-on-one coaching and guidance focusing on mental health and well-being with referral, through specially trained Fair Futures coaches and referrals to local programs and alternative therapy providers that align with youth preferences and needs.

Strengthening Supports for Justice-Involved Youth

ACS is also focused on providing services and supports to justice-involved youth, both in the community and for those who are ordered into our care. As part of last

year's Youth Safety and Success Initiative, ACS received funding to expand two programs that have demonstrated effectiveness at reducing justice involvement. The first is Girls JustUs, a highly successful gender-responsive juvenile justice diversion program targeted at girls and was operating in Brooklyn and is now expanding to serve the Bronx in FY26 and Queens in FY27. The second program is Assertive Community Engagement and Success (ACES), an evidence-based program for high-risk youth that have been involved in the justice system. This program provides social pathways from gang and gun violence to young people ages 16-24 and is in the early stages of being expanded citywide so that over 500 young people will be able to participate each year.

The FY27 Preliminary Plan also includes \$194.5 million of state funds replacing city starting in FY26 for ACS. This "At-Risk Youth" funding is from the state and is part of a larger adjustment of \$300 million state funds replacing city funds across several city agencies. We are still awaiting final details from the state and OMB regarding these funds, but we are pleased that the state is adding these funds and acknowledging our shared commitment to New York City's Youth.

There are currently over 340 young people across our two secure detention facilities, Crossroads and Horizon. While the number of young people has risen in the secure juvenile detention centers, the total number of 16- and 17-year-olds in custody in New York City has significantly decreased in the last 10 years. In January 2013, there were over 300 16-and 17-year olds held on Rikers Island. In 2016, there were 200 and today, there are less than 200 who are 16 and 17. Second and relatedly—youth are primarily in detention pre-trial and we are seeing increased lengths of stay—this is due to the fact that the youth have complex, serious cases that take a long time to move

through the court process--- over 73% of the youth are in detention due to a murder or murder related charge.

ACS strongly believes that despite the increase in census, young people ordered to be detained should be receiving age-appropriate services in the juvenile system. We are doing this every day and our efforts to ensure youth in our care receive a trauma-informed and education-centered experience as possible is both taking hold and being recognized. Last year, the Nunez Monitors alerted the Court that their work pursuant to the agreement we entered into voluntarily was complete: The Nunez Monitors stated: *"The various reforms implemented by ACS have **decreased violence and improved safety** and have showcased ACS' and facility leadership's commitment to design and sustain a durable vision for the facility's operation that addresses youth's individual needs and supports the staff who work at Horizon.... Fundamentally, **the Monitoring Team's goal is to become unnecessary, and ACS has demonstrated its internal capacity to identify and address its problems and challenges without the need for external oversight...** Now that ACS has achieved Substantial Compliance with the three final provisions in the Fourth Voluntary Agreement, it appears the **Monitoring Team's work with ACS is complete.**"*

The FY27 Preliminary Budget Plan includes additional investments so that we continue to address the needs of the youth in detention. When fully implemented, the initiative includes \$8.1 million in city funds starting in FY27, which adds 40 staff, as well as additional funding for expanded cleaning and barber services to ensure the safety and well-being of young people while they are in our care. There are also expense funds for the development and operation of additional classroom space at Crossroads.

As the Council knows, ACS has been working with DDC to construct an Annex at Horizon, which will not only expand capacity but also create additional space for classrooms, programming, vocational training, health and mental health services and dining. The Annex will also include a new exercise pavilion, due to open in FY27, and 7 of the additional staff will support programming in this new space, while the additional 33 staff will ensure safety and security at both sites. For secure detention, our capital budget includes funding for the Horizon Annex and the capacity expansion project at Crossroads, which will provide additional space prior to the Annex's completion. All of these investments are aimed at enhancing ACS's ability to meet the needs of the increased census of older youth in detention.

Conclusion

As you can see, the ACS team and our provider partners have made much progress this past year, ensuring New York City's children, youth and families have access to the services and supports that help them to thrive. As we move forward, we remain committed to listening to the voices of the parents, children and youth directly impacted by our work, and remaining on the path that enables us to make the best decisions for each family, child and youth we encounter.

Thank you Chair and members of the Committee for your continued support, collaboration and commitment to making New York City a better place for children, youth and families.

**TINY
MOMENTS,**

**AN EMPTY CRIB MEANS BIG
SAFETY. KEEP PILLOWS,
BLANKETS, AND TOYS
OUT OF THE CRIB.**

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TESTIMONY

**Before the Council of the City of New York
Committee on Children and Youth
Hearing on
The Preliminary Budget for
Fiscal Year 2027**

Presented by

Commissioner Sandra Escamilla-Davies

March 16, 2026

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

I am Commissioner Sandra Escamilla-Davies. I am joined by Chief Financial Officer Nevita Bailey, First Deputy Commissioner Alan Cheng, and other DYCD staff who will be ready to answer your questions. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department's Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget.

I come to this role as a proud social worker with over 25 years of experience in human service, most recently as Executive Vice President of Children's Aid. My work has focused on supporting youth from cradle through college and career by building cross sector partnerships with schools, community organizations, government, and philanthropy, to ensure young people and families have the resources to thrive.

What I have learned throughout my career is that youth development and community development are deeply interconnected. The more we invest in young people and help build their skills, knowledge, and resilience, the more they contribute to their communities in innovative ways and emerge as leaders and changemakers. And when we build communities that offer resources, stability, and support, we create the conditions that allow young people to thrive. In that way, investment in youth and investment in communities reinforce one another and strengthen the city as a whole.

Since assuming this role, I have had the privilege of meeting with staff across the agency and have been inspired by the dedication and expertise that define DYCD. The agency has accomplished a great deal for youth, families, and communities across New York City. As DYCD has grown significantly in the number of contracts and programs we manage, our infrastructure has not always expanded at the same pace, yet staff continue to deliver with commitment and ingenuity. As we respond to the evolving needs of the city, I am assessing how our infrastructure, staffing, and processes can best support our teams, our providers, and ultimately the young people and communities we serve, building on a strong foundation to reach even greater impact.

To support this work, my assessment focuses on three interconnected areas. First, our operational backbone, including fiscal management, procurement, contracting, legal, and payment systems, to better understand how resources move through the agency and how we can support providers in delivering services reliably. Second, programmatic capacity, examining the structures, resources, and guidance within divisions to identify strengths and areas where additional support could strengthen program delivery. And third, performance and evaluation, assessing how DYCD tracks outcomes and measures impact so that public investments achieve their intended results and inform continuous improvement.

In parallel, I am conducting listening tours with providers to gather their perspectives. These conversations focus on two areas: operational insights into how procurement, contracting, and payments affect their ability to deliver services, and programmatic insights into how programs are working on the ground, including innovations that support youth and families in equitable, safe, and effective ways.

By strengthening our internal capacity and drawing on the expertise of our provider partners, we can position DYCD to deliver at the highest level and advance Mayor Mamdani's vision of a more equitable, affordable, safer, and healthier New York City for all New Yorkers. I also see this work happening in close partnership with colleagues across city government, including OMB, MOCS, and New York City Public Schools, so that together we can better align our resources and expand our impact in the communities we serve.

The Preliminary Budget demonstrates Mayor Mamdani's commitment to our work. Despite the city's budget challenges, our preliminary budget does not include any cuts to core programming. At the same time, we are working with OMB and City Hall, in accordance with Executive Order 12, to identify savings in the current and out years.

The budget stands at \$1.6 billion, compared to the \$1.2 billion in the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget.

- \$1.5 billion or about 92% is city tax levy funds;
- \$98.1 million, or 6.00%, in federal funds;
- \$18.4 million, or about 1.12%, in state funding; and
- \$5.2 million, or 0.32%, in intracity funds.

These resources support a wide range of investments across the agency's portfolio. While not an exhaustive list, I want to highlight several key initiatives that reflect how these funds strengthen services for young people, families, and communities across the city.

COMPASS Request for Proposals

DYCD recently issued the largest afterschool RFP in New York City history for COMPASS K–8 programs, receiving 1,488 proposals for review and evaluation. The Fiscal 2027 Budget includes \$747 million to support this significant expansion. Having come from the nonprofit sector, I know this is welcome news for our providers. The RFP stabilizes contracts and includes increased rates, while updating the program model and expanding services for elementary school students. The expansion includes 20,000 additional elementary seats, with 5,000 seats opened this past fall, 10,000 planned for fall 2026, and 5,000 more to be allocated for fall 2027. It also strengthens the model by providing additional support for center-based programs, refining personnel roles including support for youth with disabilities and a stronger focus on students' emotional health and enhancing program content requirements.

Summer Rising

The Summer Rising 2026 application portal opened on March 3 and will close on March 27. Families are expected to receive enrollment information on April 21. DYCD and New York City Public Schools will continue to strengthen and expand summer enrichment opportunities, including field trips and career exploration.

Runaway and Homeless Youth Bed Expansion

We appreciate the support of Chair Stevens and the Committee for funding an additional 100 beds for unhoused young adults. Four sites have opened so far, providing a total of 50 beds. The remaining sites require additional work to receive certification from the State Office of Children and Family Services and are expected to open before the end of the fiscal year.

This past Saturday, we completed the annual NYC Youth Count to collect data on unhoused youth and young adults. These data will help inform the city's planning, policies, and services to better meet their needs.

Summer Youth Employment Program

Mayor Mamdani officially launched the Summer Youth Employment Program on January 20, the earliest application opening in the program's history. In a social media video, the Mayor encouraged young people to apply, and the program is currently on pace to receive more applications than last year, once again setting a record. During the February school break, DYCD also hosted an SYEP Week "Five Days, Five Boroughs" tour to promote the program and connect with young people across the city. Providers partnered with the New York City Housing Authority and Cornerstone community centers, using digital vans to help youth complete their applications. Funded at \$241 million, SYEP will serve more than 100,000 youth this summer.

This year, we are expanding CareerReady programming to 260 schools, up from 230 in 2025, and continuing High School Credit and CareerReady CUNY Reach so more students can earn high school or college credit. We are prioritizing NYCHA residents, youth living in six Priority Precincts, and young people facing barriers to employment. To strengthen support for youth with disabilities, we recently hosted a Rethinking Disabilities panel with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, New York City Public Schools, and nonprofit partners, and are providing training and resources to help providers design more inclusive programs and recruit employers. We are also continuing initiatives piloted in previous years, including SYEP Pride, in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial Justice and the NYC Commission on Human Rights, which offers provider and employer training, supportive work experiences, and professional development for participants.

Community Resources for Employment and Development Program (CRED) NYC

Last year, DYCD launched the Community Resources for Employment and Development (CRED) initiative to expand workforce opportunities across New York City. CRED serves New Yorkers ages 18 to 40 who are justice involved or from communities disproportionately impacted by crime and violence. The program provides up to 24 weeks of work readiness and occupational skills training in high demand sectors, along with paid internships, job placement support, and wraparound services.

Funded at \$38.5 million in Fiscal 2027, the program is expanding to serve 1,000 participants. Early results are promising, with more than 200 industry recognized credentials earned and participants placed in internships and jobs with employers including Michelin recognized restaurants, the MTA, Con Edison, the Department of Education, and construction and healthcare organizations across the city. CRED has also helped some justice involved participants stabilize their lives and avoid deeper involvement in the legal system through workforce engagement and strong provider support.

Fatherhood Expansion

DYCD increased investment in Fatherhood programs to \$9 million, doubling the number of participants served each year from 1,500 to 3,000. In addition to expanding program slots, the funding allows providers to serve both noncustodial and custodial fathers across a broader range of income levels. As part of the expansion, 14 providers were selected for 17 contracts, and the new program began on January 1, 2026.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss the Fiscal 2027 Preliminary Budget. We look forward to answering your questions.



**JUMAANE D.
WILLIAMS**

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH
AND FINANCE
MARCH 16, 2026**

Good morning,

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

Recidivism is a persistent problem across the country and in New York City. Equally problematic is the weaponization of recidivism to walk back the progress made over the last decade eliminating some of the most harmful practices of the criminal legal system. Raise the Age is blamed for “skyrocketing youth crime,” when youth crime has declined or remained at the same levels as prior to the implementation of Raise the Age.¹² The only category where crime has increased for youth is possession and discharging of firearms.³ This is a serious concern, and we must do more to ensure that young people feel safe in their communities, including investing in violence interruption programs, as well as education, after-school programming, and youth jobs. In order to truly address recidivism, we must have honest, fact-based conversations, not fearmongering for political gain.

When New York passed the Raise the Age law, it also came with a promise to invest in the services that keep young people out of the criminal legal system. However, that investment has not materialized. To date, less than a third of the designated funds for Raise the Age have been allocated, and New York City hasn’t received a dollar. Raise the Age recognized that 16- and 17-year-olds must be treated differently than adults because of their vulnerable developmental status—and it is that same vulnerability that demands we invest in programs and services that keep young people positively engaged and out of trouble. I am thankful that the Speaker and Majority Leader of the State Legislature have finally included \$100 million of this funding in the state budget. Still, the state can and should do more, including creating the Youth Justice Innovation Fund, which would take \$50 million of unspent Raise the Age funds and allocate them directly to community-based organizations around the state working to prevent youth arrest and incarceration, and to support positive youth development through age 25.

¹ <https://www.sentencingproject.org/press-releases/new-report-finds-youth-incarceration-declined-by-74/>

² <https://criminaljustice.cityofnewyork.us/reports/nyc-youth-crime-in-context-arrest-recidivism/>

³ <https://www.thecity.nyc/2025/12/15/raise-the-age-youth-crime-statistics/>

The preliminary budget nearly doubles funding for ACS Alternatives to Detention (ATDs), investing \$15 million. ATDs have been shown to reduce recidivism, improve public safety, and minimize costs. They also strengthen families and communities by preventing the reverberating collective trauma that often results from a person's incarceration, and incarceration for youth and young people is particularly damaging. The city's secure youth detention centers are over capacity, with some kids sleeping on the floor in common spaces or classrooms.⁴ While the city seeks to expand their detention capacity, we should instead be incarcerating fewer young people. This funding is crucial in that mission.

The Comprehensive After School System (COMPASS) is a network of more than 890 after-school programs that serve NYC K-12 students.⁵ These programs are offered at no cost to their participants, and are housed in a variety of locations including schools, community centers, public housing, and religious institutions. COMPASS Explore is smaller and offers more specialized services, with some specifically aimed at serving LGBTQ youth or students with disabilities.⁶ The preliminary budget allocates \$254 million to COMPASS, a 50 percent increase from FY 2026. I thank the administration for this funding and hope to continue to see investments in after-school and summer programming to keep our youth positively engaged.

It is more urgent than ever to ensure that our undocumented students and newest New Yorkers have access to the services and support they need. In January 2023, the city launched Promise NYC, which helps families who previously didn't qualify for other state or federal programs due to their immigration status, including undocumented parents and asylum-seekers.⁷ It is especially important for recently arrived children to have access to early childhood services, as many are English language learners, and many have experienced significant stress and trauma on their way to New York. This program allows around 1,000 children to enroll in early care and education programs, but the current \$25 million funding will expire at the end of June.⁸ The Mamdani Administration and the City Council must ensure that this funding is renewed.

Young people are the future of New York City, and what we invest in youth services now will impact our city for years to come. After the previous administration's years of disinvestment and late payments to providers, it is time to truly prioritize our youth.

Thank you.

4

<https://gothamist.com/news/young-nyc-detainees-sleep-in-classrooms-common-areas-amid-overcrowding-lawyers-say>

5

<https://www.nyc.gov/site/dycd/services/after-school/comprehensive-after-school-system-of-new-york-city-compass.page>

6

<https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2024/03/21/after-school-cuts-to-compass-explore-and-sonyc-due-to-eric-adams-budget-cuts/>

⁷ <https://www.nyc.gov/content/getstuffdone/pages/promise-nyc>

⁸ <http://advocatesforchildren.org/policy-resource/budget-priorities-2027/>



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth

Re: FY27 Preliminary Budget – Children and Youth

March 16, 2026

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is May DePierro, and I am Policy Associate at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For more than 50 years, Advocates for Children has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds, and for over 20 years, AFC's Project Achieve has advocated for greater educational opportunities for students in NYC's foster care system.

Interim Transportation for Students in Foster Care Awaiting School Bus Service

We are asking the City to invest **\$3 million to provide interim transportation for students in foster care waiting for bus service to begin.**

When a student is placed in foster care, they are already facing countless disruptions, uncertainty, and trauma. They should not also have to worry about whether they can stay in the school where their teachers and classmates know their name – or how they will get there.

The City has a legal obligation to provide transportation to students in foster care so they can stay at their original school. However, it can take weeks or even months for New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) to arrange bus service.

The City does offer prepaid rideshare when there is no bus available, but only after students have already waited at least *ten school days*. Even once it's offered, rideshare is not always feasible, as an adult must accompany the student – a task that is often impossible for foster parents with jobs or other children in the home who attend schools in totally different communities. While the City also offers transportation reimbursement, it will not reimburse for the cost of a chaperone, and the daily



reimbursement cap is often insufficient to cover rideshare services that include a vetted chaperone or longer cross-borough trips.

Consequently, many students in foster care miss school or are forced to transfer schools even though it is not in their best interest to do so. Last school year, 55% of students in foster care were chronically absent—missing at least one out of every ten school days—and one in five transferred schools at least once during the school year.

There are feasible solutions. For example, the City could contract with transportation providers that use vetted drivers and do not require additional chaperones (such as Kid Car, which operates in NYC, or HopSkipDrive, used by districts including Los Angeles); use ACS or other city-owned vehicles that include escorts, as is done for students placed at the Children's Center; launch a dedicated interim transportation service for students awaiting bus routes; hire aides to accompany students using rideshare services; or, at a minimum, reimburse chaperone costs and increase the daily reimbursement cap to cover longer trips and services such as Kid Car.

The City must do more to ensure that students in foster care have uninterrupted access to school at a critical moment in their lives and invest **\$3 million to provide interim transportation for students in foster care awaiting bus service.**

Promise NYC

In January 2023, the City launched Promise NYC to increase access to subsidized child care for children who would otherwise be ineligible for existing programs due to federal eligibility requirements. The program allows around 1,000 children to enroll in early care and education programs—helping prepare them for success in elementary school and beyond, while also enabling their parents to work and connect with resources. However, the full \$25M in Administration for Children's Services (ACS) funding for Promise NYC will run out at the end of June if not extended in the FY 2027 budget. This funding should be extended and baselined. We also support calls to increase funding for this program to help meet the demand.

Advocates for Children of New York's full city budget priorities are online at <https://advocatesforchildren.org/policy-resource/budget-priorities-2027>.

We look forward to working with you as the budget process moves forward. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Good afternoon, Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Peter Basica, the founder and Chairman of 360 Smarter Care.

Our current mental health system is built on providing services to our youth when they begin to show signs that they are troubled. It is too little too late for too many.

According to CDC data, 40% of U.S. of students report persistent depression, sadness or hopelessness, and 20% have exhibited suicidal ideation. Children in foster care are at an even greater risk for Attachment Disorder and PTSD. This is common knowledge to professionals in this space and the members of this committee.

The shortages of qualified professionals to help our youth create long wait-times. Unfortunately, the need for these services is growing faster than we produce more qualified mental health professionals.

The solution is prevention through behavioral education. Assigning more work to teachers who are already overwhelmed is not a solution.

New York must invest in preventive behavioral, emotional, mental health education delivered through, scalable digital tools that reach our youth early, consistently, and across every school and community.

360 Smarter Self, a digital prevention platform that helps young people develop the resilience and mental strength necessary to navigate our complex society.

Smarter Self can support New York's youth evenings, weekends, and the 180-days school resources are not available.

As you consider the FY2027 budget, please understand the need to immediately begin with education and prevention to help our youth develop the tools they need before they become a statistic. Thank You.

Good afternoon,

Committee Chair and members of the Committee on Children and Youth and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I Alexis Smallwood-Foote, the Administration for Children's Services needs more funded and oversight. I am a former adopted adult. I grew up in the foster care system and what I've learned is that the system treats you like a criminal and too often you are left to heal your own wounds even though you are a child. Here are three solutions I hope can be considered; solution one makes sure fostered youth have housing, solution two makes sure all youth people have access to college/ trade school programs and the third solution is working to keep families together.

Solution one is to make sure that young people have access to safe, clean and affordable housing. Housing is the foundation for having a stable life. When young people are forced to move from house to house it can become an environment for sexually abuse, sex trafficking, and worse a lot of young people end up on the streets. I am speaking from lived experience being homeless and mommy and I having to move from shelter to shelter because we denied Section 8 on multiple occasions. New York City makes money off children in the foster care system. When you are in foster care (living with a different family) you are often treated like an outcast, often disrespected by members of the foster care family and/or community. New York needs to invest in supportive housing that supports young people in New York City. This kind of housing needs psych nurses, mental health workers, social workers, and youth development that we support them as they grow into adulthood.

Solution two makes sure all youth people have access to college/ trade school programs. The children in foster care and the adopted are given educational opportunities and lack the basic skills to receive a high school diploma. We need to make sure that they have educational opportunities and resources. I would like to see the City of New York and CUNY create a program for foster children to receive access to free college courses in math, reading, and writing which would improve their skills. Trade schools are also key to having a successful society. I have a lot of friends who are in the trade because deep down inside they knew college wasn't for them. There are so many amazing young people who are trapped by the system and its racist practices. This system isn't working because we still dealing with racist ideology that doesn't benefit anyone as we can see.

Solution three such be to work with families to keep them together. My adopted mom did not love me the way my birth mom loved me. That love that I was missing affected my self-esteem as young girl, I realized that my adopted mother wanted me to be like her birth

daughter, my foster sister and that wasn't who I was. She could only love me the only way she knew how. Foster kids and adopted kids who age out or get kicked out of their homes need real financial system. Foster kids and adopted kids did not ask to be born and here we are being sexually trafficked for financial gains, trafficked by our families and everything we love, be told aren't good enough to be loved.



Testimony before the Committee on Children and Youth
Preliminary Budget Hearing
New York City Council
March 16, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the Committee on Children and Youth. [All Our Kin](#) is a national organization that provides educational mentorship, professional development, and systems-building support to family child care educators. Our mission is to ensure that family child care providers succeed as small business owners, with the tools needed to support working families and provide an early childhood foundation that sets children up for success in school and life. In New York City, we offer bi-lingual services of licensing coaching, business series, educational coaching and leadership coaching to hundreds of family child care educators, who are primarily located in the Bronx.

Across New York City, almost [100,000](#) children spend their days in a licensed, home-based child care setting. These programs are deeply rooted in their communities and provide culturally and linguistically responsive care. Families deeply value the long-term bonds and connections that educators develop with children and their families, often across multiple generations.

[Research](#) shows that young children who spend their days in consistent, high-quality early learning environments experience stronger educational and economic outcomes, with an estimated return on investment of 13%. Stability is key and interruptions or unplanned changes in child care arrangements can be deeply disruptive to a child's sense of security. These disruptions also place added strain on parents, who often depend on reliable child care to pursue work and educational opportunities.

Since federal work requirements for public assistance recipients were reinstated last year, priorities for child care assistance program (CCAP) vouchers have shifted. As a result, thousands of families who earn less than 85% of the state median income (SMI) have lost access to this critical support, leaving 17,000 children currently waiting for care.

The CCAP waitlist is compounding economic stress for family child care programs, as well, as approximately [82%](#) of all children served by CCAP use a licensed, home-based program (either family child care or group family day care). Without consistent enrollment, family child care programs will continue to feel the economic impacts of the waitlist, further risking the economic survival of a sector that is already deeply underfunded.

We offer the following recommendations in order to stabilize the child care sector and restore critical support to thousands of families:

Prioritize the full funding of the NY Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) as soon as possible, in order to restore child care assistance vouchers to the 17,000 New York City children currently on the waitlist

- New York City will need an additional \$1.21 billion in CCAP funding for federal fiscal years (FFY) 2026 and 2027 in order to make the CCAP voucher program “fully operating” with no waitlist. This includes an additional \$460 million added to the current FFY commitments and an additional \$750 million added to Governor Hochul’s Executive Budget proposal for the FFY2027.

Reallocate unused funding from DOE contracted programs to the CCAP program in order to offset new costs

- In fiscal year 2025, 26,658 DOE-contracted seats for infants, toddlers, 3- and 4-year olds were unfilled. 9,161 of these were for full-day, full year care (the remaining 17,497 were for school day/year care only). When combined with the City’s average reported cost per seat, the total cost for these unused seats was \$565.7 million. These resources could be reallocated toward the CCAP waitlist.

All Our Kin urges lawmakers to meet the scale of this child care crisis with investments and policies that reflect the essential role that child care, particularly family child care, plays in New York’s economy and within communities across the state. Sufficient, consistent investments in the CCAP are critical to supporting working families and ensuring that those who care for the youngest children earn a living wage. We remain committed to working with state and local leaders to implement solutions that center equity, support parent choice, and build a child care system that truly works for families and educators alike.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Please feel free to contact Lara Kyriakou, Senior Director of Policy, at lara@allourkin.org with any questions.



Testimony before the New York City Council

Committee on Children and Youth

Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 16, 2026

Chanel Stagers

Speakers Bureau Member

Anthos | Home

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212-606-0785

Good morning, Chair Stevens and the Committee on Children and Youth. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Chanel Stagers. I am a 25 year old senior at City College, and also a Harlem native. I became connected to the Anthos|Home program as a participant two and a half years ago, and have been member of the Anthos|Home Speakers Bureau for the past six months.

Today, I'd like to speak about how we can support young adults aging out of foster care to live and thrive independently.

In 2020, I aged out of foster care. I was not eligible for NYCHA. A group home for foster youth and supportive housing were not good environments for me to begin? continue my studies. I began college in January 2020 at 20 years old right before COVID to study political science. I moved into the dorms so I could access stable housing and move out of the group home.

It was only 22 years old when I was just moved out of my campus dorm and moved into an off campus apartment that my scholarship was offering through the company Outpost Club.

Unfortunately, I experienced was experiencing a dysfunctional and hostile housing environment that occurred beginning from the first few weeks I began staying there until till the day I left. and being that Tthe severity of the situation meant was intensified from the start, I could no longer reside there.

Due to my age, and since I exhaustedddcing all of my options, I didn't have any choice but to transition out and live independently. My The initial goal was to finish college before getting my own apartment so that I could focus on studying, but thate plan I had and my academics were interrupted.

I reached out to my resources at ACS, who helped me to get my housing voucher. Even before I got my voucher, I looked for an apartment on my own for months a while -- emailing brokers, calling landlords, searching StreetEasy, and I couldn't find anything. As soon as I mentioned my voucher, I was ghosted. Luckily, ACS connected me with Anthos|Home.

Anthos|Home came in at a very transitional moment, filled a gap where I needed support, and gave me actionable steps for what to do. It felt more reliable than trying to do it myself.

Once Anthos|Home was the home finder, the barriers were removed.

I saw two apartments. The first apartment was beautiful, and I could picture living there, but a problem with my voucher paperwork meant the apartment went to someone else. I filled out the paperwork for the second apartment, since I needed to move quickly, and got approved.

With Anthos|Home, I found an my apartment and moved in two months, compared to the months I was searching before. I broke out of the repetitive process. It was all quicker with more support. The housing navigation services were essential.

Unfortunately, my story is not unique. In the City of New York, of the 429 youth who aged out of foster care in 2023, 31% had to stay in a foster or group home because they simply had no other housing options. And while the remaining 69% were afforded housing, their options left them in neighborhoods saddled with the legacy of redlining where they reported feeling unsafe alone.

Case workers and social workers at foster care agencies are balancing a lot of responsibilities, and don't have the specialized knowledge like a housing navigator to properly help. Access to housing navigation shouldn't come down to luck. Every young adult should have this level of

support as they transition to living independently. Automatic partnership with a housing navigator, like the for academic guidance through Fair Futures, would make all the difference.

Funding for specialized support, like housing navigators through Anthos|Home enhances stability for young adults in transition, and is absolutely essential for the success of young adults aging out of care, like me. Since September 2023, Anthos|Home has moved over 150 young adults who have aged out of foster care into stable homes. There are still over 300 young adults navigating the process annually with minimal housing navigation support.

There are also opportunities for low-cost process changes that would ease the burden on youth navigating independently for the first time, including streamlining the CityFHEPS voucher package and improved communication between agencies. A complete CityFHEPS voucher package is often over 100 pages when it is submitted, and the DHS review checklist includes more than 100 criteria for approval.

Sometimes, I wonder if I could have gotten the first apartment I saw with Anthos|Home had the application process been less complicated, and communication between agencies was more seamless. By streamlining the voucher package compilation and review process to eliminate duplicative and unnecessary checks, the City can significantly speed moves out of shelter and into homes.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.



Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on Children and Youth
Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 16, 2026

Sasha Kouptsova
Aftercare Specialist
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212-606-0785

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the preliminary budget. My name is Sasha Kouptsova, and I am an Aftercare Specialist at Anthos|Home. We are a nonprofit that helps New Yorkers with housing vouchers move out of shelter and into permanent housing as quickly as possible. We are also a member of the Family Homelessness Coalition, Homeless Services United, and the Homes Can't Wait Coalition.

Today, I'd like to speak about how we can address the homelessness crisis at New York City Public Schools. In the 2024-25 school year, more than 150,000 students experienced homelessness. The impact is severe: 67% of students in shelters were chronically absent, and they dropped out of high school at triple the rate of their housed peers.

Housing vouchers are a proven solution to homelessness, but they are dramatically underutilized. A 2024 report from the State Comptroller estimates that only 21% of households with CityFHEPS shopping letters get their voucher approved. The challenges are compounded for young adults without support systems and parents managing their children's needs while living in shelter.

At Anthos|Home, we not only see the devastating impact of housing instability on children and young adults, but also how targeted housing solutions and assistance can make an enormous difference in their lives. Our program model demonstrates how filling in the gaps in the voucher process can eliminate the roadblocks youth and families face and speed moves. To date, we've moved more than 1,100 New Yorkers into permanent homes, including over 430 children and 155 youth aging out of foster care, and maintained 100% housing stability.

Funding for School-Based Housing Pilot

Anthos|Home is requesting funding for a school-based housing pilot that would bring our model to a group of high-need public schools and move all voucher-eligible students and their families out of shelter and into homes. By pairing NYCPS's established, trust-based communication pathways (like the Every Child and Family is Known program) with Anthos|Home's housing navigation expertise, the pilot will be empower families to use CityFHEPS vouchers and move into permanent homes. The pilot will help New York City Public Schools address one of the root causes of chronic absenteeism, academic challenges, and socio-emotional needs—housing instability—and reduce the costs of supporting students living in shelter, such as busing students in shelter to school.

Low or No-Cost Process Changes

There are also opportunities for immediate and impactful low or no-cost changes to the voucher process that would ease the process for youth and families with children. These include:

1. Streamlining the CityFHEPS Voucher Package

A complete CityFHEPS voucher package is often over 100 pages when it is submitted, and the DHS review checklist includes more than 100 criteria for approval. By streamlining the voucher package compilation and review process to eliminate duplicative and unnecessary checks, the City can significantly speed moves out of shelter and into homes.

2. Adjust Shelter Transfer Process (as recommended by Citizen’s Committee for Children New York)

Families are often moved from shelter to shelter, which causes children to have to transfer schools or parents to make hours-long commutes for drop off and pick up. By guaranteeing initial shelter placements within the school district or borough of family’s youngest child’s school, as well as expediting the process to request and receive shelter transfers, the City can minimize disruptions in education and unnecessary burdens on families.

Together, these solutions will help more children and young adults move out of shelter and into homes and reduce the negative impacts of housing instability on these vulnerable populations.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I’m happy to answer any questions you may have.



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**TESTIMONY OF THE ARAB AMERICAN FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER BEFORE
THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH
March 16, 2026**

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens and members of the Committee on Children and Youth. My name is Hizam Wahib, and I am the Assistant Executive Director of the Arab-American Family Support Center, known as AAFSC.

AAFSC serves roughly 20,000 New Yorkers each year, and our staff speaks more than 20 languages. Over 70 percent of our clients were born outside the United States, many from historically underserved communities. Our work centers on families by helping them stabilize during challenging times, maintain stability, and ultimately thrive.

Today I want to highlight three initiatives that are critical to supporting immigrant children, youth, and families across New York City.

First, AAFSC is proud to be a recipient of City's First Readers funding. Alongside 16 nonprofit partners, this initiative helps ensure that New York City children from birth to age five receive the early literacy support they need to succeed in school and in life. Each year, City's First Readers reaches nearly one million children, caregivers, educators, and early childhood providers with research-based programming during the most critical years of brain development.

Through this initiative, AAFSC operates our Caregiver-Child Bonding Circle, a linguistically accessible parenting support program for caregivers and children ages 0 to 3. Offered in Arabic and Bangla, the program runs in multiple 10 to 12 week cycles each year and focuses on play-based learning, early talk strategies, and strengthening caregiver-child relationships to support cognitive, social, and emotional development.

The caregivers we serve are primarily low-income immigrant Arab and South Asian women who face significant barriers, with the majority living below the poverty line. Many have limited formal education, and most are not employed outside the home. For many participants, the bonding circles also serve as a critical peer support network that reduces isolation and helps caregivers navigate parenting in a new country.

Also critical to our community is our Young Adult and Youth Program, which serves immigrant and refugee youth ages 10 to 24. At a time when many young people in our communities face immigration related trauma, rising hate incidents, and the impact of global conflicts, this program provides a safe and supportive space for youth to grow and thrive. Through academic support, career guidance, mentorship, civic engagement, and mental health resources, we help young people build leadership skills while strengthening cultural identity and resilience. In 2025, the program served 220 participants.

We are also proud recipients of Adult Literacy Forward initiative funding and a member of the New York Coalition for Adult Literacy. Through this work, AAFSC supports hundreds of new arrivals learn English and navigate life in their new city.

There are more than 2.2 million adults in New York City who have limited English proficiency or do not have a high school diploma, and 1.7 million of them are immigrants. Our free daily classes help students build English speaking and literacy skills that allow them to find jobs and apartments, go to the doctor, and speak with their child's teacher. Our curriculum focuses on practical language skills that support employment, civic participation, and access to essential services.

In the current climate of heightened anti-immigrant enforcement and restrictive policies, our Adult Education and Literacy program serves as a gateway to AAFSC's comprehensive services. Students and their family members gain access to youth leadership programs, health insurance and SNAP enrollment, legal services, emergency financial assistance, food and resource distribution, housing navigation, domestic violence case management, mental health counseling, and parenting support.

To continue meeting growing demand, we respectfully request:

- \$10 million for the City's First Readers initiative.
- \$70,000 in discretionary funding through City's First Readers for AAFSC's Caregiver-Child Bonding Circle to sustain and expand culturally responsive services for immigrant families.
- \$100,000 in discretionary funding for our Young Adult and Youth Program and \$75,000 for our Young Women Leadership program.
- An increase in Council discretionary funding for adult literacy from \$14.5 million to \$18 million, and the consolidation of all Council adult literacy funding under Adult Literacy Forward.
- \$325,000 in discretionary funding through Adult Literacy Forward for AAFSC's Adult Education and Literacy Program.

Continued Council investment ensures that New Yorkers of all ages, regardless of language, background, or zip code, have the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive. As immigrants are under attack, these services are vital to their safety.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to New York City's children, youth, and adult learners.



CAMBA Inc.

Testimony Before the New York City Council

Preliminary Budget Hearing

Committee on Children & Youth Services

March 16, 2026

Council Member Stevens and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Valerie Barton-Richardson, and I serve as the President and CEO of CAMBA, Inc. and CAMBA Housing Ventures, Inc.

Each year, CAMBA proudly serves nearly 80,000 individuals and families across New York City through more than 180 programs at over 100 locations in all five boroughs. Our work is rooted in a comprehensive, client-centered approach designed to help New Yorkers achieve stability and self-sufficiency. For decades, CAMBA has strengthened communities through programs focused on education and youth development, community support services, economic development and workforce initiatives, and critical housing assistance. Through this work, we see firsthand how vital accessible, high-quality education and enrichment opportunities are for children, youth, and adults across the city.

Although the FY27 Preliminary Budget has restored funding for summer programming, there is still more work that must be done to prepare for Summer 2026. In addition to addressing the operational challenges that have affected Summer Rising in recent years, the City should work with community-based organizations to pilot additional summer program models alongside Summer Rising. While the model was created in Summer 2021 to address pandemic-related learning loss and help students transition back to in-person schooling, the needs of students and families have evolved. Summer 2026 presents an important opportunity to rethink how summer programming can best support young people today.

Feedback from families, youth participants, and community-based providers highlights several challenges with the current model. Many families depend on free summer programming provided by the City; surveys of participating families indicate that more than half would not have an alternative option if Summer Rising were unavailable, with that number even higher among low-income households. This underscores how essential city-funded summer programming is for working families.

At the same time, middle school participants have reported lower levels of engagement with the academic component of the program, particularly during the morning sessions led by the Department of Education. Youth shared that they often feel disconnected from the academic portion and would benefit from more hands-on, engaging learning opportunities that align with their interests. Parents have also reported challenges with communication about the academic portion of the program, including limited clarity about curriculum, teaching staff, and how their children's individual learning needs are being addressed.

Community-based providers have also raised concerns about whether students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and English Language Learners are consistently receiving appropriate supports. Providers report ongoing challenges related to staffing, including shortages of paraprofessionals to support students with IEPs. Additionally, some English Language Learner students report not fully participating in the academic component and instead being assigned alternative activities that may not support their academic development.

Data released by the Department of Education's Summer Rising 2024 Impact Analysis further highlights the need to reassess the model for middle school youth. According to the analysis, middle school participants who attended Summer Rising programming for 20 or more days did not see statistically significant improvements in math performance. In addition, those participants performed somewhat worse in reading scores compared with similar students who did not attend the program. While Summer Rising continues to provide an important service for families, these findings suggest that the current structure may not be the most effective model for all age groups, particularly middle school students.

The summer months provide a unique opportunity for young people to learn in ways that differ from the traditional school year. Summer programs can emphasize experiential learning, outdoor activities, field trips, social development, creative expression, and exposure to future educational and career pathways. Families with greater financial resources often have access to a wide range of summer camps and specialized programs, while many low-income families depend entirely on city-funded programs to ensure their children have safe, enriching opportunities during the summer.

CAMBA and other community-based organizations have extensive experience delivering youth programming that integrates academic enrichment with social-emotional development, leadership opportunities, arts programming, and recreational activities. Models such as community-based summer camps, youth leadership programs, arts-focused camps, and project-based learning programs demonstrate that a variety of approaches can effectively engage young people while supporting their development.

For example, some community-based summer models emphasize creative arts and community building, where youth participate in dance, theater, music, and visual arts while also engaging in group projects and trips throughout the city. Others operate through a “club model,” where students choose from a range of enrichment activities and leadership opportunities, which helps increase engagement and retention. These types of approaches provide flexibility and allow youth to pursue interests that keep them motivated and connected during the summer months.

Providing families with multiple program options would allow summer programming to better reflect the diverse needs of New York City’s youth. The City should work with community-based organizations to pilot alternative models alongside Summer Rising, evaluate outcomes, and expand approaches that demonstrate strong engagement and positive results.

In addition to youth programming, CAMBA strongly urges the City Council to invest \$18 million in City Council funding for adult literacy services that sustain programs not currently eligible for funding under the Department of Youth and Community Development’s Adult Literacy Request for Proposals.

In New York City, an estimated two million adults have limited English-language proficiency or lack a high school diploma. Community-based adult literacy programs—such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE), and High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation—provide critical pathways for New Yorkers to gain the skills needed to secure higher-paying jobs, support their children’s education, and fully participate in civic and economic life. CAMBA operates adult literacy programs that serve as key entry points for adult learners, many of whom are later connected to workforce training, employment services, and other wraparound supports that strengthen family stability and economic mobility.

However, the Department of Youth and Community Development’s FY25 Adult Literacy RFP introduced geographic eligibility requirements tied to specific Neighborhood Tabulation Areas. These restrictions significantly limited which organizations could apply for funding and excluded many long-standing providers, including programs serving communities with high need.

To address the resulting gaps, the City Council invested \$16.5 million in discretionary funding in FY25 and FY26 to sustain adult literacy programs that otherwise would have been forced to close. This investment is currently supporting more than 60 programs across the city. For CAMBA and many other community-based providers, City Council funding has been essential to continuing adult literacy services for thousands of learners.

Stable funding is essential for adult literacy programs to maintain qualified instructors, provide consistent class offerings, and support the infrastructure necessary for effective instruction. Thousands of adult learners rely on these programs to build the foundational skills that allow them to access employment, pursue further education, and support their families.

Conclusion

CAMBA urges the City Council to continue prioritizing investments that expand opportunity and strengthen communities. By piloting diverse summer program models and increasing funding for adult literacy services to \$18 million, the City can ensure that both young people and adult learners have access to the programs they need to succeed. We appreciate the Council's continued leadership and partnership in supporting community-based organizations like CAMBA that work every day to help New Yorkers achieve stability, opportunity, and long-term success. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.



Valerie Barton-Richardson
President and CEO
CAMBA, Inc.

CARNEGIE HALL

New York City Council Fiscal Year 2026

March 16, 2025

Preliminary Budget Hearing: Committee on Children & Youth

Chair Stevens and Members of the Council Committee on Children & Youth:

My name is David Freudenthal, and I am the Director of Government Relations at Carnegie Hall. Thank you for the opportunity to testify about Carnegie Hall's longstanding commitment to New York City's young people. I am glad to testify about the ways that CIGs, including Carnegie Hall, have deep partnerships within City agencies in support of our city's children and youth. The Council makes this vast breadth and depth of work possible through supporting DCLA and the culture budget. Unique public private partnership makes possible exceptional programs and resources supporting young New Yorkers in challenging circumstances, as well as the dedicated city staff caring for these young people. Collectively, CIGs and other cultural organizations across this City offer opportunities for everyone, especially our young people to realize their full potential.

Carnegie Hall is a leader in creating affordable, accessible, and far-reaching music education and social impact programs that inspire the next generation of music lovers, nurture musical talent, contribute to the evolution of music education, and explore how music can play a meaningful role in people's lives. Each year, these free or low-cost programs reach 130,000 people in NYC in orchestras, arts organizations, homeless shelters, correctional facilities, hospitals, and of course, and schools. As Carnegie Hall provides these essential programs at low or no cost to participants, Carnegie Hall takes on a significant financial obligation in delivering world-class education and programs for young New Yorkers and their families.

Carnegie Hall is also a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG), a collective of 39 nonprofit museums, performing arts centers, historical societies, zoos, and botanical gardens across all five boroughs with a distinct private-public partnership with the City of New York and a commitment to serving all New Yorkers. In keeping with our public service mission, CIGs support young New Yorkers with high quality free or low-cost programming, as well as to advocate for essential help from government to sustain our sector during moments of uncertainty and crisis. In the context of that advocacy, **Carnegie Hall endorses the CIG request to baseline an additional \$30 million in dedicated funding to DCLA to support cultural organizations to provide sustainable youth arts programming for all.** This funding is critical to supporting culture and arts jobs that impact and inspire young people in all five boroughs. Without this funding, cultural organizations face burdensome challenges in staffing, planning, and programming. This impacts the wide variety of essential youth programs our organizations deliver across the city.

In addition to our advocacy on behalf of our city's youth, I'm glad to share information about the Hall's direct service to New Yorkers, including constituents in each of your Council Districts: Carnegie Hall works closely with parents, public officials, and young people to ensure that our programs intentionally prioritize those who otherwise may not have access to these opportunities. I'm glad to share some examples:

- Carnegie Hall’s early childhood programs encourage connection, well-being, and creativity for families, most of whom are facing challenging personal circumstances. The [Lullaby Project](#) pairs new and expectant parents and caregivers with professional artists to write and sing personal lullabies for their babies, supporting maternal health, aiding child development, and strengthening the bond between parent and child. Since the launch at Jacobi Medical Center in 2011, thousands of families have written original songs for their children through city agency partnerships including the NYC Departments of Education (DOE’s LYFE program), Correction (DOC), Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), and Homeless Services (DHS), the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), Health + Hospitals (H+H), and the Housing Authority (NYCHA). [Big Note, Little Note](#), is a free music class for NYC families that offers a range of experiences for families and caregivers to engage with their babies through musical play, singing, instrument exploration, and more. The program is centered around community, and supports family well-being, early childhood development, and parent-child connection.
- [The B Side](#) is a free intensive program for New Yorkers ages 14-22 interested in the business of music, with a focus on those from under-resourced communities. The B Side provides participants an interactive space to learn about the inner workings of the music industry. Curriculum is designed and facilitated by teaching artists, and music executives, while guest speaker panels, and field trips guide participants through the many roles and career paths across the industry. Participants, experienced youth development facilitators, and guests are encouraged to co-create a learning community that supports the development of aspiring artists and future music industry leaders.

This season, participants will progress through activities beginning with an exploration of the various career tracks through the music industry and an introduction to key terms and concepts. Activities will include engaging in lessons/curricular activities; presentations from guest speakers; field trips to record labels, music tech companies, local recording studios, music festivals, venues; panels and interactive discussions; and jam sessions/performances. This is a paid experience. Participants receive a stipend, transportation and meals.

Through The B-Side, Carnegie Hall draws upon our experience creating meaningful youth development programs to deepen our impact and provide young people with the tools they need to thrive, lead, and transform the music industry.

The B-Side is now being piloted as an innovative diversion program on Rikers Island, giving eligible justice-involved youth the tools they need to explore careers in the music industry, providing workforce development, a supportive network of peers and mentors, and an invaluable outlet of expression.

- In partnership with NYC’s Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), Carnegie Hall’s [Future Music Project \(FMP\)](#) harnesses the transformative power of music to nurture, amplify, and celebrate the creativity of young people ages 14-19 in juvenile justice settings. Carnegie Hall’s Teaching Artists

engage young people through workshops, field trips, and performances that explore many facets of music—from honing skills in songwriting and performance to discovering career paths in the music industry. Using music as a vehicle, FMP supports young people navigating the trauma of incarceration by providing a space to learn and express their creativity.

- Regarded by DOE’s Office of Arts and Special Projects as a lead partner in music education, Carnegie Hall’s school programs have effectively delivered the agency’s standards for music education, providing high quality, fundamental music instruction and best practices by amplifying and celebrating the cultural richness of our city for over a decade. Our learning and engagement programs inspire the next generation of music lovers in NYC’s K-12 classrooms and support local teachers in refining their skills. This year, the Hall supports school-based programs both in-person and remotely, including [Link Up](#) and [Musical Explorers](#) for elementary-age children, [Music Educators Workshop](#) for NYC teachers, and for middle and high school students through [Ensemble Connect](#).

- Carnegie Hall has been a longstanding partner of the New York City Department of Education, offering collaboration through the Middle School Arts Audition Bootcamp at Lincoln Center, the Summer Arts Institute at Frank Sinatra School of the Arts, the Professional Learning Day series for Music Educators and programming at the ArtsHub. Carnegie Hall has been a strong thought partner for staffing, planning and future envisioning for the DOE through these programs. New this year, Carnegie Hall is proud to be partnering with the DOE to feature six of the All-City High School Music program ensembles in an end of year showcase in Stern Auditorium on Sunday, May 10th at 1pm, welcoming over 300 DOE students onto the stage with side-by-side performances and guest artists.
 - [Musical Explorers](#) connects over 6,000 students in grades K–2 to NYC’s rich and diverse musical community as they build fundamental music skills through listening, singing, and moving to songs from all over the world. Each season, students meet six NYC–based artists who each represent a different musical genre and cultural tradition. Teachers have access to a free curriculum, professional development, and a culminating interactive concert for their students.

 - [Link Up](#)—Carnegie Hall’s longest running education program—introduces the orchestra to roughly 11,000 children annually in grades 3-5, inviting them to sing and play an instrument in the classroom and perform with a professional orchestra from their seats at a culminating concert at Carnegie Hall. Both programs continue to expand with digital platforms that provide teachers with free online resources, including lesson plans, artist-led videos, and virtual concert experiences.

- This year, there are still openings in the Link Up program. Slots for participating students are still open, and Carnegie Hall we would be glad to follow up with your committee and offices with recruitment information to share with your constituents.
- [Music Educators Workshop](#) provides on average more than 150 NYC K–12 music teachers monthly professional development each year, in a vital space for teachers to recognize their shared experiences and receive support, community, and professional growth. Leading artists and educators join as faculty to lead curriculum tracks pertinent to this season’s theme for NYC teachers, “The Art of Great Teaching.” The program leverages teachers as catalysts to enhance the quality of instruction for 32,000 NYC students each year. A hallmark of this program is to inspire artistry and seeing teachers as artists in their own right. MEW provides teachers with opportunities to participate in ensembles each year with a culminating concert. This year, our educator ensembles will take the stage in Zankel Hall on June 6th, 2026 and will feature a Wind Ensemble, Contemporary Strings Ensemble, Vocal Ensemble and a Neo Soul Ensemble.
- [Ensemble Connect](#) is a program of Carnegie Hall and The Juilliard School in partnership with DOE. Ensemble Connect places extraordinary young classical musicians for a two-year fellowship in NYC public schools. Fellows partner with DOE music teachers to bring insight, creativity, and artistry to classrooms; and create interactive performances in schools and at community sites.

Carnegie Hall respectfully asks the Committee on Children and Youth’s support for the following requests:

- **Renewal of \$200,000 through the Innovative Criminal Justice Programs Initiative would underwrite the fifth year of The B-Side**, a free intensive program for a minimum of 40 New Yorkers ages 14-22 interested in the business of music, with a focus on those from under-resourced communities. The B Side provides participants an interactive space to learn about the inner workings of the music industry. Curriculum designed and facilitated by teaching artists, guest speaker panels, and field trips guide participants through the many roles and career opportunities across the industry. Participants, experienced youth development facilitators, and guests are encouraged to co-create a learning community that supports the development of aspiring artists and future music industry leaders.
- **Renewal of \$150,000 Speaker’s Initiative for Carnegie Hall’s Music and Well-being programming with an increase to \$200,000:** In alignment with the Council’s Mental Health Roadmap, Carnegie Hall’s Lullaby Project is an evidence-informed, low-cost, safe, and scalable approach to supporting caregivers, infants, and early relational health. The Lullaby Project invites families, often in high-stress environments, to create, sing, and record their own personal lullabies. Since its inception in 2011 in response to patient care needs identified by Jacobi Medical Center’s neonatal unit staff, the Lullaby Project has helped to create approximately 4,000 lullabies, in over 40 languages, and currently has 60+ Lullaby Partners across the U.S. and globe.

Carnegie Hall's Well-Being Concerts combine world-class musical performances with elements of self-care and mindfulness, animated by evidence that music helps people heal and thrive. Each concert creates an immersive, nurturing space in which audiences and performers share in the soul-nourishing benefits of music, create shared experiences, and explore tools for well-being that last long after the performance.

As NYC navigates a world of uncertainty, Carnegie Hall's education programs are critical components of the city's strategy to meet people directly, effectively, and affordably where they are. The Council's continued investment in these partnerships will be absolutely essential in the year ahead. We thank the Committee for their interest in these programs, and we encourage the Council to invest in these opportunities and other programs by our cultural colleagues across the city.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with you individually to discuss Carnegie Hall's youth programming partnerships in your district. You are all welcome to attend events such as Huddle family performances, Fall Family Day, and more. Thank you for your support for and consideration of our requests, and thanks to our public partners, artists and arts organizations, and the talented young people involved in these programs for being a part of truly transformational work.



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

My name is Amanda McCarthy, and I am Senior Director and Youth Policy Lead at CASES. At CASES we believe that too many futures are cut short by unnecessary incarceration. CASES does what prisons cannot: we restore hope by giving the city's most vulnerable residents opportunities to heal, grow, and succeed in their communities.

We served over 12,000 New Yorkers last year, including 741 young people. Our programs prevent young people from experiencing the trauma of incarceration and support their personal goals for education, employment, health, and housing, and promote mental wellbeing through clinical and case management services.

Access to community-based programs is critical to divert young people from entering or furthering their involvement in the criminal legal system. The FY27 budget must support the planned expansion of our ACES program and double the Council's Court-Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative to uplift young New Yorkers.

ACES: \$10.1 Million

CASES ACES program works to divert young men, particularly those that are disconnected from school, community, and employment opportunities, from the criminal legal system. Through persistent outreach, intensive mentorship and meeting participants' immediate material needs, our credible messenger staff build trust and meaningful relationships with ACES participants. With this strong foundation, participants share goals and proactively engage in their own development. They participate in paid transitional employment services, pursue high school equivalency courses, and engage in work readiness. **86% of all ACES participants successfully avoided arrest while in the program.**

ACS has proposed expanding ACES to serve more young people in the Bronx, Central Harlem, and Brooklyn, with \$10.1 million in funding. Current funding does not meet demand, and more young people are becoming caught up in the criminal legal system and detained in juvenile justice facilities. Young people are spending more days in detention, as the population of our juvenile justice facilities rises.

Double Funding for the Court-Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative - \$6.89 million

We encourage the Council to invest further into community-based programs for justice involved youth, by doubling funding for the Council's Court-Involved Youth Mental Health



Initiative. This initiative supports mental health services for **3,000 young people annually served by 21 providers**. Over 65% of children in the juvenile legal system have a diagnosable mental health condition. Current providers report waitlists and unmet demand, and additional organizations need this funding to better serve young people.

CASES utilizes City funding to support its Adolescent Portable Therapy (APT) program, providing cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and in-house family therapy that helps young people heal and thrive. With increased funding, CASES would create a Director of Clinical Services to oversee all youth mental health services, ensuring high quality care for hundreds of young people. Doubling the Court-Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative is a critical component to improve the emotional wellbeing of our young people.

Choices+: Building Positive Relationships at Home

CASES Choices+ Alternative to Detention (ATD), funded by ACS, provides support to youth at a critical time, as they face criminal charges in the Bronx and Manhattan Family Courts and Youth Parts of Criminal and Supreme Courts. Choices+ allows them to avoid detention, rebuild positive relationships at home, and work towards healthy, independent adulthood. Through family therapy, education support, and court compliance & advocacy services, young people have the tools to reclaim and reach their goals.

If these youth had been held in detention facilities, they would be exposed to the trauma of incarceration while separated from their families, missing school, and limited mental health support. Incarceration simply does not allow young people to get on track or develop the healthy coping skills that Choices+ provides.

CRED: Supporting Young People's Employment Goals

To truly transform the future for young people, we must create pathways for employment and economic mobility. Our young people deserve training for real career advancement opportunities that can support a quality standard of living in our city. Job readiness programs like CRED (Community Resources for Employment and Development), funded by DYCD, provide paid career training and certifications, allowing them to meet current needs while investing in their future selves. CRED launched last summer and has served over 30 residents of communities most affected by violence, including those as priority areas by the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force.

Expanding services for young people is critically needed now. Current funding does not meet demand, and more young people are becoming caught up in the criminal legal



system and detained in juvenile justice facilities. [As reported in the most recent Mayor's Management Report:](#)

- There has been an increase in the juvenile cumulative rearrest rate, to 21.1% from 16.5%, demonstrating more frequent rearrests and a need for focused support,
- A dramatic increase in the length of stay in secure detention, from 65 days to 111 days, and
- Due longer length of stay in detention, the average daily population of youth in detention increased 22% from 318.4 to 386.8 youth held daily in detention facilities.

[Youth incarceration decreases likelihood of graduating high school, reduces college enrollment and lowers employment and future earnings in adulthood.](#) For our young people to thrive, they must be diverted from the criminal legal system and given opportunities for success. The FY27 budget must reflect this need by supporting the expansion of ACES and doubling the Court-Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative.

We appreciate the City's commitment to helping young New Yorkers avoid involvement in the criminal legal system and achieve their full potential. Thank you.

Amanda McCarthy

Senior Director, Executive Office

Astagnaro@cases.org



March 18, 2026

Written Testimony of Elizabeth Morgan

Handwritten initials 'EM' in black ink, enclosed in a small circle.

Director, NYCID YouthBuild IMPACT

Before the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth
Regarding the FY 2027 Preliminary Budget

Hello, Chair, members of the Committee on Children and Youth, and distinguished members of the New York City Council. My name is Elizabeth Morgan, and I am the Director of New York Center for Interpersonal Development (NYCID) YouthBuild IMPACT. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the FY 2027 Preliminary Budget and to speak on the critical importance of restoring the NYC YouthBuild Initiative funding to \$2.1 million, consistent with FY24 levels so that disconnected young adults across New York City continue to have access to education, workforce pathways, leadership development, and the support systems necessary to succeed.

NYCID YouthBuild IMPACT serves young adults, ages 18-24 who have often been failed by traditional systems and who arrive at our doors in need of far more than a training program. They come seeking structure, stability, academic re-engagement, career direction, positive relationships, and a renewed sense of purpose. Our young people are resilient and full of potential, but many have experienced educational interruption, unemployment, justice involvement, trauma, housing instability, and other barriers that have placed them at risk of long-term disconnection. YouthBuild exists to change that trajectory.

Our program is built on a proven model that combines education, hands-on vocational training, leadership development, civic engagement, and community service. We do not simply prepare young people for their next step; we help them build the foundation for long-term success.

At NYCID YouthBuild IMPACT, we are deeply committed to youth education. We help participants reconnect to learning, build academic confidence, and work toward their educational goals in an environment that is structured, supportive, and accountable. For many of our young people, YouthBuild is the first place where they begin to see themselves not through the lens of failure, but through the lens of possibility.

We are equally committed to hands-on vocational training that creates real pathways to employment and economic mobility. Our participants receive practical training, industry-recognized certifications, work readiness preparation, and exposure to career pathways that can lead to family-sustaining wages. Youth leave our program with more than technical skills; they leave with discipline, confidence, and a clearer vision for their future.



YouthBuild also places a strong emphasis on civic engagement and leadership development. We believe young people must be prepared not only to enter the workforce, but also to use their voices, understand their power, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Through student leadership opportunities, advocacy, voter engagement activities, and public service, participants begin to see themselves as agents of change.

In addition, community service remains a core component of our program model. Our young people are taught that success is not only about personal advancement, but also about giving back. Service allows them to rebuild their relationship with community, gain pride in their contributions, and understand that they have value and responsibility as future leaders of this city.

The impact of YouthBuild is best reflected in the success of our graduates.

TJ, a 22-year-old young man, participated in our YouthBuild pre-apprenticeship program and today is an apprentice with Local 20 of the NYC Carpenters Union. While enrolled in YouthBuild, TJ served as Student Council President, maintained perfect attendance, and was a model of leadership, accountability, and consistency for his peers. His success represents what is possible when a young person is given the structure, expectations, and support needed to thrive.

Jesus, age 24, is currently employed by APTIM, a leading professional solutions firm specializing in environmental, sustainability, resilience, and infrastructure solutions. His journey reflects the effectiveness of our workforce model and demonstrates how YouthBuild can help young adults transition into meaningful employment in growing and high-impact industries.

We are also proud of Jesisha, a YouthBuild graduate who is now working as an MTA Conductor. This achievement reflects the transformative power of exposure, training, and opportunity. Jesisha's story is a reminder that the young people who come to us with barriers are the same young people who, with support, go on to hold essential positions that keep New York City moving.

Lastly, Ricardo, a recent graduate, earned his Community Health Worker certification and today is employed by a nonprofit affiliated with the Neighborhood Stat (NSTAT) initiative, a community-driven effort developed through the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. Ricardo's success demonstrates that YouthBuild not only prepares youth for employment, but also helps cultivate community leaders committed to public service and neighborhood well-being.

These young people came to YouthBuild lacking structure, education, skills, leadership, and direction. What they needed was not to be dismissed, but to be developed. They needed a program that would see their potential, invest in their growth, and hold them to a high standard while surrounding them with support. That is what NYCID YouthBuild IMPACT provides every day.

Our work is especially important for young people who have been impacted by the justice system. NYCID YouthBuild IMPACT works closely with NYCID Credible Messengers of Staten Island and True 2 Life to support our adjudicated youth and other young people facing serious barriers.

These partnerships are invaluable. They help us provide mentorship, intervention, guidance, and credible support from individuals and organizations that understand the lived experiences of the young people we serve. For participants who are navigating reentry, court involvement, or chronic instability, these relationships can mean the difference between continued system involvement and a pathway toward healing, responsibility, and opportunity. NYCID's Credible Messengers of Staten Island publicly describes its work as violence interruption, crisis response, conflict resolution support, and case management linking clients to services.

For this reason, I respectfully urge the Council to protect, restore, and strengthen the NYC YouthBuild Collaborative budget line in the FY 2027 budget. Investment in the YouthBuild is an investment in education, public safety, workforce development, and community stability. It is an investment in young adults who are ready for change and who, with the right support, can become workers, union members, public servants, health advocates, leaders, and role models in their communities.

The City cannot afford to underinvest in programs that have demonstrated success in reconnecting young people to education and employment while also strengthening families and communities. YouthBuild is not a short-term intervention. It is a long-term solution that addresses disconnection at its root and creates measurable pathways toward self-sufficiency and civic participation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your continued commitment to the children and youth of New York City. We urge the Council to continue investing in YouthBuild and in the future of the young people we are proud to serve.



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

- Family
- Criminal
- Community Development
- Civil/Housing

Click on the name of any program to learn more.

STATEN ISLAND

1. Staten Island Justice Center

MANHATTAN

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

MULTI-BOROUGH

6. Legal Hand (Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens)

BRONX

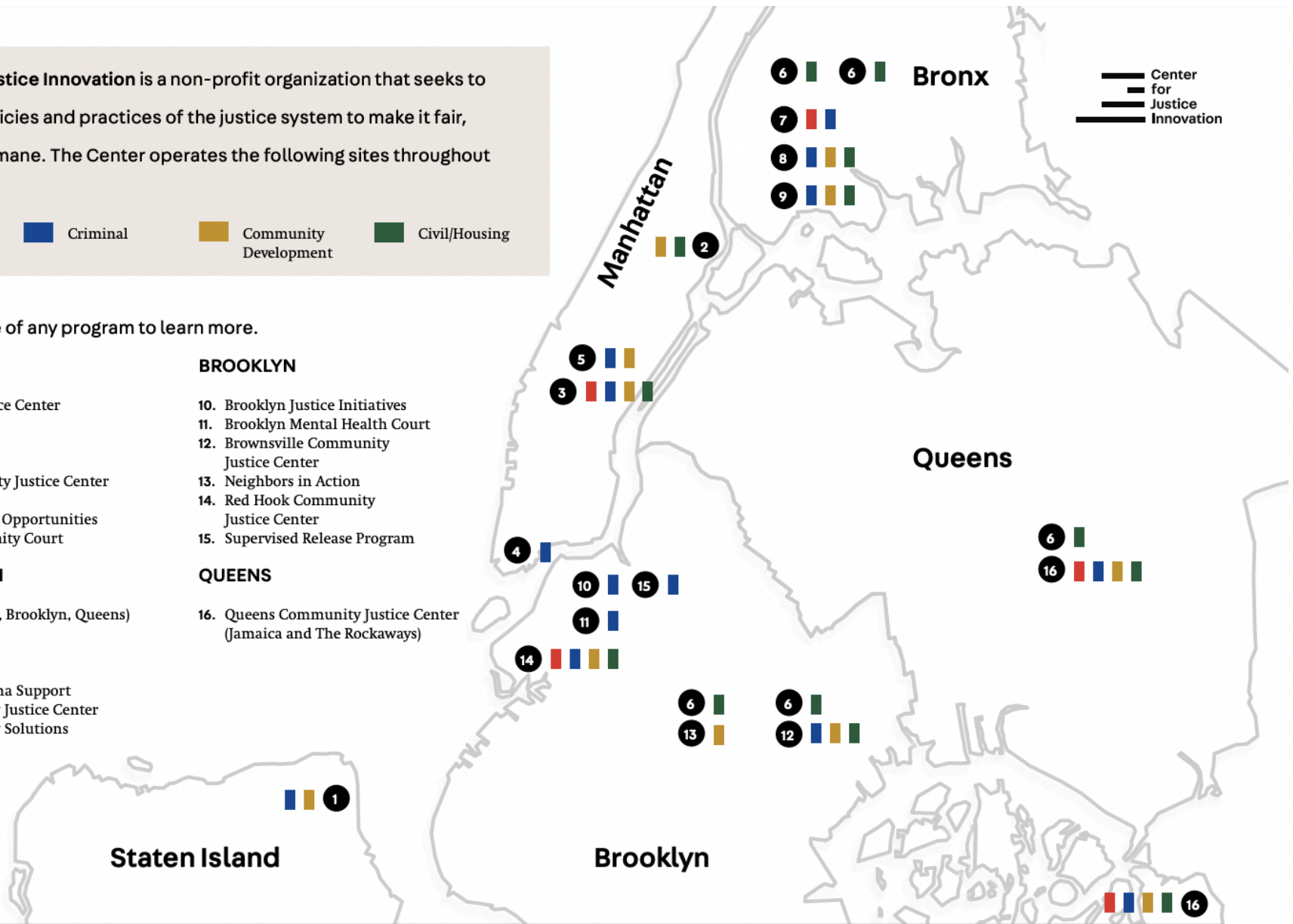
7. Bronx Child Trauma Support
8. Bronx Community Justice Center
9. Bronx Community Solutions

BROOKLYN

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

QUEENS

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



Citywide

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

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**Center for Justice Innovation
New York City Council
Committee on Children and Youth
March 16, 2026**

Good morning Chair Stevens and esteemed members of the Committee on Children and Youth. My name is Gerald Kimbrough and I serve as the Associate Director of Community Safety for the Bronx Community Justice Center, an initiative of the Center for Justice Innovation (the Center). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

The Center partners with courts, communities, and local stakeholders across New York City to develop solutions that promote safety while addressing the underlying challenges that bring young people into contact with the justice system. We know that when young people have access to mental health care, supportive relationships, and meaningful opportunities, they are far more likely to thrive and far less likely to become involved in cycles of harm or system involvement. These cycles, in addition to being harmful to individuals and communities, are deeply costly. Investments in youth programming can effectively reduce downstream costs by preventing future reliance on far more expensive justice and crisis systems.

Across court-based, community-based, and prevention-focused programs, the Center works to intervene early, respond effectively to trauma, and create pathways toward stability and success for young New Yorkers. The initiatives outlined below demonstrate how targeted City Council investments help stabilize families, strengthen youth development, and prevent deeper justice system involvement by meeting young people where they are—with services grounded in healing, accountability, and opportunity. With \$300 million annually in new investments from the State committed to youth programming, we request the Council provide sustained support for these programs that ensure New York City is not only responding to crises but building pathways to stability and opportunity for young New Yorkers.

Community-Based Youth Programming

Bronx Community Justice Center

The Bronx Community Justice Center (BXCJC) is a community-based hub for public safety, youth opportunity, and neighborhood investment serving residents of the South Bronx. The Justice Center works to create safer and more equitable communities through a comprehensive approach that combines violence prevention, youth development, economic mobility, and community healing.

Through programs grounded in community leadership and restorative practices, BXCJC addresses the root causes of violence and justice system involvement while expanding opportunities for young people and families. The Justice Center's work spans several key areas,

including community violence prevention, youth leadership and employment opportunities, neighborhood revitalization, and workforce development.

A core focus of BXCJC's work is supporting young people most impacted by violence and systemic inequities. Through initiatives such as the Insight Initiative—an alternative-to-incarceration program for youth facing serious charges—the Justice Center provides healing-centered programming that allows young people to take accountability, address trauma, and build pathways toward long-term stability and success. BXCJC also offers paid youth internships in areas such as music production, digital media, and community planning, helping participants develop valuable skills while contributing to neighborhood safety and engagement.

The Justice Center also works to strengthen neighborhoods through placekeeping and community-led safety initiatives that transform public spaces, support local businesses, and engage residents in shaping solutions to violence and disinvestment. In addition, workforce development and entrepreneurship programs provide pathways to economic mobility for community members.

Funding from the City and State helps sustain this critical work and ensures that the Justice Center can continue to expand opportunities for South Bronx residents.

Save Our Streets (S.O.S.)

The Center for Justice Innovation's Save Our Streets (S.O.S.) program operates out of both the Bronx Community Justice Center and Neighbors in Action in Brooklyn, and works to prevent gun violence using the public health-based Cure Violence model. This approach recognizes that violence spreads through communities much like a disease and can be prevented through early intervention, community engagement, and credible messengers.

S.O.S. staff—many of whom have deep ties to the neighborhoods they serve—work directly with individuals at the highest risk of being involved in gun violence, either as victims or perpetrators. Violence interrupters and outreach workers engage community members on the street, mediate conflicts before they escalate, and provide mentorship and guidance that helps individuals choose nonviolent paths. Staff also connect participants to supportive services such as employment opportunities, education, and counseling.

A key component of the program is its hospital response work. When a shooting occurs, S.O.S. staff partner with local hospitals to respond directly to gunshot wound victims and their families. By offering support and resources at a critical moment, the program helps prevent retaliation and interrupt cycles of violence.

S.O.S. also mobilizes the broader community to take an active role in violence prevention. Through public education campaigns, community events, and neighborhood outreach, staff work alongside residents, local businesses, and community organizations to promote peaceful conflict resolution and reinforce the message that gun violence is both unacceptable and preventable.

Faith leaders are also central partners in this work. S.O.S. collaborates with faith-based institutions to engage trusted community voices in violence prevention efforts, encouraging leaders to counsel individuals at risk of violence, support affected families, and speak out publicly against gun violence.

S.O.S. currently operates with a single eight hour shift. However, we know that violence can happen at any time and in high needs areas beyond current catchment areas. As a part of this network, we urge the City Council to support structural city-wide investments that strengthen the

Crisis Management System’s infrastructure, including funding for 24/7 coverage and expanding violence interruption services and wrap-around supports into neighborhoods most impacted by gun violence.

Reimagining Intimacy through Social Engagement (RISE) Project

The Center for Justice Innovation’s RISE Project advances community-based strategies to prevent violence and support the healthy development of young people by addressing the intersection of intimate partner violence (IPV) and community gun violence. While these issues are often treated separately, young people growing up in neighborhoods most impacted by gun violence are also disproportionately exposed to domestic violence and relationship harm, experiences that can have lasting effects on mental health, safety, and long-term well-being. RISE works alongside New York City’s Crisis Management System programs to deliver prevention-focused services that strengthen families, promote safety, and reduce young people’s exposure to gender-based violence.

A central component of RISE is youth prevention programming designed to equip young people with the tools to build healthy relationships, manage conflict, and support their peers. Through structured workshops, peer education, and mentorship opportunities, youth participants engage in programming focused on healthy relationship norms, emotional wellness, and leadership development. These initiatives culminate in youth-led community projects, arts programming, and public discussions that encourage positive peer influence and foster safer neighborhood environments. By engaging young people early, RISE helps interrupt cycles of violence before they escalate into justice system involvement.

Beyond direct youth programming, RISE strengthens the broader ecosystems that shape young people’s lives. The program trains community-based organizations, schools, faith institutions, and local partners on trauma-informed approaches, bystander intervention, and violence prevention, while coordinating neighborhood responses to IPV-related incidents. RISE also provides support and voluntary interventions for individuals who have caused harm, connecting them to employment, housing, and behavioral health services to promote accountability and reduce future violence—ultimately creating safer environments for children and families.

In FY25 alone, the program connected with about 10,000 individuals through workshops, crisis support, youth programming, community-based prevention initiatives, community events and outreach.¹ City Council funding supports youth-focused prevention programming, community workshops, healing events, and public education efforts that help young people grow up in safer, healthier communities while preventing violence before it occurs.

Brownsville Girls Collaborative

The Brownsville Girls Collaborative (BGC) is a cornerstone leadership development program at the Brownsville Community Justice Center, designed to support the holistic empowerment of young women ages 15–18 who are at high risk of violence or justice system involvement. The program creates a safe, supportive space where participants engage with peers, mentors, and facilitators to address the root causes of trauma, violence, and risk behaviors while building leadership skills and positive community connections. Grounded in a trauma-informed,

¹ Center for Justice Innovation. (2025). Justice Center Application and Reset referral database. [Data file].

youth-led, and peer-based approach, BGC helps participants heal from personal and community trauma while strengthening their ability to become positive leaders within the Brownsville community.

Using a rites-of-passage framework, BGC recognizes the intersection of interpersonal, community, and structural violence experienced by young women—particularly women of color—and works to divert participants from justice involvement while promoting personal growth and long-term opportunity. The program provides academic support, leadership development, and pathways to employment, internships, and careers in fields where women of color are historically underrepresented, including science, technology, design, and engineering. Participants also engage with gender-focused movements and professional networks across New York City, helping them navigate barriers within education and the workforce.

City Council funding would allow the Brownsville Community Justice Center to expand programming to serve more than 75 young women, including alumni, through aftercare services, new short-term projects, and expanded workshops and trainings led by female-identifying professionals and community organizers. Funding would also provide participant stipends to support engagement and economic mobility, while strengthening opportunities for leadership development, community engagement, and professional advancement. Through these efforts, BGC advances public safety by investing in young women’s healing, leadership, and long-term success.

Queens Community Justice Center UPLIFT

While men and boys of color are too often viewed as perpetrators in our society, many are victimized by violence. Despite being at high risk of violent victimization from multiple kinds of violence (community, interpersonal, family), young men of color who have been involved in the justice system are rarely recognized as crime victims, rarely self-represent as crime victims, and are rarely treated as survivors of crime by their communities or by the agencies that provide coordinated services.² Yet the overlap between victimization and justice system involvement should not come as a surprise. Among adult offenders, experience with childhood violence and trauma is high; in a study conducted with inmates in a medium security prison in New York State, more than two-thirds reported that they had experienced some form of childhood victimization. Nationally, approximately half of all young people involved in juvenile justice systems have a history of significant trauma.³

To address the high levels of exposure to community violence and trauma among young men of color in Queens, the Queens Community Justice Center piloted UPLIFT in FY2022, a program that provides trauma and healing services to justice-involved young men of color. By offering client-driven individual therapeutic sessions and supportive group workshops, case management and victim services assistance, and advocacy and mentoring, participants are supported to recognize, process, and heal their own trauma, resulting in better life outcomes. Given the program’s initial success, the Justice Center was able to fully implement and sustain the program, thanks to the ongoing support of the City Council.

² Sereed, D. (2014, December). Young Men of Color and the Other Side of Harm. <https://www.vera.org/publications/young-men-of-color-and-the-other-side-of-harm-addressing-disparities-in-our-responses-to-violence>

³ Weeks, R., & Widom, C. S. (1998). Self-reports of early childhood victimization among incarcerated adult male felons. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 13(3), 346–361. <https://doi.org/10.1177/088626098013003003>

Few programs help address the trauma histories of young men that often perpetuate their justice involvement and halt their development into healthy adulthood. UPLIFT serves young men between the ages of 16-25 that live in Queens neighborhoods that face substantial environmental challenges, including high levels of violence, poverty, and unemployment. In particular, UPLIFT provides trauma and healing services to community members who have been touched by gun violence, in a manner designed to meet participants “where they are,” in terms of type, intensity, and location of services. The Center is requesting continued funding to support this invaluable program.

Staten Island Justice Center Youth Impact & Youth Wellness Initiative

The Staten Island Justice Center, an operating program of the Center for Justice Innovation, has served Staten Island residents since 2009 through court-based services, youth prevention programming, and community partnerships aimed at improving public safety and reducing justice system involvement. Each year, the Justice Center serves over 2,000 individuals through supervised release, counseling, case management, employment support, leadership development, and wellness programming for both adults and youth.

In response to growing community needs, the Justice Center is working in partnership with the Richmond County District Attorney’s Office to establish a Staten Island Community Justice Center modeled on successful sites in the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn. With City Council support, a 2023 public safety assessment identified local strengths, service gaps, and priority needs, informing the development and launch of new pilot initiatives.

The Justice Center seeks continued funding to sustain and expand these initiatives, including strengthening the Youth Impact restorative justice program through the addition of a Case Manager and expanding youth cohorts focused on music production, technology, and creative skill-building. These efforts aim to divert young people from the legal system, promote positive youth development, and advance community-based approaches to safety and prevention.

The Justice Center is also seeking support for their Youth Wellness Initiative (YWI), which provides wraparound support to court-involved and at-risk youth experiencing unmet mental health and social needs. YWI offers individualized services including wellness assessments, short-term counseling, restorative justice circles, peer mentorship, trauma-informed workshops, and family support. Referrals come from courts, schools, and community partners, allowing youth to access tailored interventions that promote healing, accountability, and community reintegration. With City Council support, YWI will serve 15 young people in Staten Island, funding key staff and resources necessary to deliver these critical services and reduce long-term justice system involvement.

Court-Based Youth Programming

Brooklyn Mental Health Court Youth Initiative

The Court-Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative at Brooklyn Mental Health Court provides specialized support for young adults ages 18 to 24 who are navigating both mental health challenges and justice system involvement. This population represents a growing share of participants served by the court and often has unique developmental, social, and cognitive needs that require age-appropriate interventions. Since 2017, nearly 200 youth in this age range have

been served by Brooklyn Mental Health Court, helping them stabilize their mental health, comply with court mandates, and avoid further justice system involvement through structured engagement, therapeutic support, and community-based programming.⁴

With City Council support, Brooklyn Mental Health Court established a dedicated Youth Engagement Social Worker position to lead youth-focused programming and build strong relationships with participants. The program offers cognitive behavioral therapy groups, youth support groups, professional development workshops, and monthly prosocial activities—such as arts programming, cultural outings, meditation workshops, and community-based experiences—designed to promote engagement, skill-building, and positive social connection. The program also provides healthy meals and snacks, which have proven essential in encouraging consistent participation among youth.

Renewed funding will allow Brooklyn Mental Health Court to sustain and strengthen these youth-centered services by maintaining the Youth Engagement Social Worker position, continuing therapeutic groups and enrichment activities, supporting staff training in evidence-based practices for emerging adults, and covering program supplies, activities, and participant meals. Together, these investments help young people stabilize, reconnect with education and employment opportunities, and reduce the likelihood of continued justice system involvement while promoting healthier outcomes for youth and their communities.

Strong Starts Court Initiative

The Strong Starts Court Initiative is a Family Court-based program that provides specialized, two-generational support to infants, toddlers, and their families involved in child protection proceedings. Serving children from birth to age three—the most critical period of early development—the initiative works with families whose cases are before the New York City Family Court following allegations of abuse or neglect filed by the Administration for Children’s Services.

Strong Starts addresses a significant gap within the child welfare system by integrating expertise in infant development and infant mental health directly into court processes. Through comprehensive clinical assessments, ongoing consultation, and coordinated service planning, the program helps judges, attorneys, and caseworkers make developmentally informed decisions that promote safe parenting, strengthen caregiver-child relationships, and reduce harmful disruptions such as placement instability or prolonged separation.

First piloted in the Bronx in 2015 and now operating across all five boroughs and additional counties, Strong Starts connects families to high-quality, targeted services while fostering collaboration among courts, child welfare agencies, and providers. Evaluations of the program have demonstrated an increased rate of family preservation, greater efficiency in case resolution, enhanced family well-being, and a reduced likelihood of future abuse or neglect petitions.⁵ In addition, Strong Starts strengthens systemwide practice by training legal professionals in early childhood development, extending its impact beyond participating families. City Council funding will allow the Strong Starts Court Initiative to reach more

⁴ Center for Justice Innovation. (2025). Brooklyn Mental Health Court Database. [Data file].

⁵ Sharlein, J. (2021, August). Helping the Youngest Start Life Strong: A Mixed Methods Evaluation of the Strong Starts Court Initiative.

https://www.innovatingjustice.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2021/SSCI_eval_full_report_FINAL4.pdf

families, strengthen early intervention, and improve outcomes for some of the City's most vulnerable children during a critical period of development.

Conclusion

Together, these programs represent a continuum of support that reaches young people at critical moments—whether they are navigating court involvement, experiencing trauma and community violence, or seeking positive pathways toward leadership and stability. City Council investments make it possible to provide developmentally appropriate mental health services, restorative and community-based alternatives, and prevention programming that strengthens families and neighborhoods while improving long-term outcomes for youth. Considering the challenging financial situation the City finds itself in, investing in young people through prevention and early intervention is one of the most effective ways to reduce future justice system involvement and long-term public costs.

Sustained and expanded funding for these initiatives will allow the Center for Justice Innovation and its partners to continue reducing justice system involvement, supporting healthy development, and advancing safer communities across New York City. By investing in children and youth today, the Council helps ensure that young people have the support, stability, and opportunities they need to build healthier futures for themselves and their communities. We respectfully urge continued support for these programs and thank the Council for its ongoing commitment to New York City's young people and families.



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Courtney Bryan, Chief Executive Officer

innovatingjustice.org

Center for Justice Innovation FY27 Proposals

- **#2156900 - Center for Justice Innovation General Funds - \$750,000**

Innovative Criminal Justice Programs (Renewal); Speaker's Initiative

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

Community-Based Youth Programming

- **#2243733 - Brownsville Girls Collaborative - \$150,000**

Young Women’s Leadership Development (Renewal)

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

- **#2246699 - IPV Community Intervention - \$219,000**

Domestic Violence and Empowerment Initiative (Renewal)

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

- **#2246286 - Queens Community Justice Center UPLIFT - \$100,000**

**Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations (Renewal);
Court-Involved Youth Mental Health (Renewal);
Speaker's Initiative (Renewal);
Community Safety and Victims Services**

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

- **#2246334 - SIJC Youth Wellness Initiative - \$130,000**

Court Involved Youth Mental Health (Renewal)

Description: This is a renewal proposal for the Staten Island Justice Center's Youth Wellness Initiative (YWI), a program providing comprehensive wrap-around services to

court-involved and justice-impacted youth in Staten Island, ages 12 to 18. The initiative aims to decrease the likelihood of long-term justice involvement while supporting those who may have unmet mental health needs. We specifically seek to engage youth who have either participated in community harm—such as assault, robbery, or gang violence—or who have experienced trauma through community or domestic violence. The primary objective of YWI is to foster restoration through transformative education, youth-led community engagement, peer support, individual counseling, and advocacy. The program also aims to help parents and guardians better support their children and help them navigate the justice system. Ultimately, participants are empowered to translate their therapeutic encounters into opportunities to reintegrate and restore themselves within their communities.

- **#2247007 - Staten Island Justice Center/Community Justice Center - \$200,000**

Speaker's Initiative (Renewal)

Description: In response to growing community need, the Staten Island Justice Center has worked in close collaboration with the Richmond County District Attorney's Office to plan and begin operationalizing programming for a Staten Island Community Justice Center. When fully implemented, this Community Justice Center will offer a robust array of programming, including replications of community-based interventions piloted and established at the Center for Justice Innovation's existing Community Justice Centers in the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn. In FY23, with City Council support, the Staten Island Justice Center conducted a public safety assessment, which sought to pinpoint community strengths, needs, and gaps in service for Staten Island residents. Continued City Council support has enabled the Staten Island Justice Center to use the results of the survey to inform the Community Justice Center planning process, as well as develop, pilot, and implement several new initiatives responsive to identified community needs. The Staten Island Justice Center respectfully seeks continued funding for FY27 to support this ongoing work, and, particularly, to sustain implementation of the piloted initiatives, and bolster programming by hiring a Youth Impact Case Manager.

Court-Based Youth Programming

- **#2246404 - Strong Starts Court Initiative - \$100,000**

Children Under Five (New)

Description: The Center for Justice Innovation seeks funding to build the capacity of the successful Strong Starts Court Initiative to meet the needs of infants, toddlers, and their

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

- **#2243598 - BMHC Court Involved Youth Mental Health - \$150,000**

Court Involved Youth Mental Health (Renewal)

Description: The Court-Involved Youth Mental Health initiative of Brooklyn Mental Health Court provides specialized support to youth ages 18 to 24, who have unique social and cognitive needs and who represent a growing percentage of cases the program serves. Since 2017, more than 240 youth in this age range have been served by Brooklyn Mental Health Court. City Council support ensures that Brooklyn Mental Health Court can retain a dedicated Youth Engagement Social Worker to lead youth programming and foster close relationships with participants. Renewed funding will enable Brooklyn Mental Health Court to continue and strengthen youth-focused programs, provide participants with meaningful activities, supply healthy meals and snacks to participants, continue essential training for staff, and maintain the position of Youth Engagement Social Worker.

- **#2243510 - Brooklyn Mental Health Court - \$250,000**

Speaker's Initiative (Renewal)

Description: Launched in 2002 as the first mental health court in New York City, Brooklyn Mental Health Court (BMHC) is a specialized court that seeks to craft meaningful responses to the problems posed by defendants with mental illness in the criminal justice system. Addressing both the treatment needs of defendants with mental illness and the public safety concerns of the community, BMHC links defendants with serious and persistent mental illnesses (such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder) or neurodevelopmental disorders, who would ordinarily be jail- or prison-bound, with long-term treatment as an alternative to incarceration. BMHC performs psychosocial assessments and psychiatric evaluations, comes up with treatment plans, monitors clients' adherence to treatment plans, and refers clients to community-based services. For FY27, BMHC is seeking renewal funding from the Speaker's Initiative to enhance its support of some of the City's most vulnerable residents.



DARCEL D. CLARK

**THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
BRONX COUNTY**

March 9, 2026

Speaker Julie Menin
New York City Council
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Menin and Members of City Council:

On behalf of the Bronx District Attorney's Office, I am pleased to write this letter in support of key Center for Justice Innovation (formerly, Center for Court Innovation) FY27 City Council Applications. Funding will expand:

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

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

For the past several years, the City Council has supported the Bronx with **\$710,000** to invest in early system diversion, which includes **Project Reset**, the Center's citywide pre-arraignment diversion model and same day at arraignment programming that re-directs New Yorkers with misdemeanor arrests from the court system. Project Reset Bronx includes borough-wide restorative justice circles to aid in diversion. This has offered relief from the collateral consequence's participants might otherwise experience if arraigned for low-level crimes. We support the Center in continuing to partner with the Council to implement the next generation of early system diversions for the Bronx to continue to lead the City in scaled restorative justice-based interventions. In 2025, Bronx Assist was launched, a promising pre-arraignment diversion program for certain Desk Appearance Ticket (DAT) arrests which is being piloted in the 44th Precinct with support from a two-year federal grant. CJI has demonstrated a willingness to partner on this project and has shown a willingness to see it succeed.

Thanks to meaningful changes in the treatment of trafficking victims in the justice system, the Center's **Bronx Human Trafficking Intervention Court (HTIC)** referrals continue to decline. **Project Healing and Empowerment through Advocacy and Leadership** (Project

HEAL) is a survivor leadership and peer support initiative for human trafficking survivors. Additionally, we support the Center's RISE Project which is used in Family Court and provides community-based intimate partner violence prevention services in communities most impacted by gun violence.

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

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

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

Sincerely,



Darcel Clark



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
RICHMOND COUNTY

MICHAEL E. MCMAHON
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

March 3, 2026

Speaker Julie Menin
New York City Council
City Hall
New York, New York 10007

Re: Support for Center for Justice Innovation Fiscal Year 2027 Initiatives

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

I am pleased to offer my strong support for the Center for Justice Innovation's Fiscal Year 2027 funding request to expand alternatives to incarceration, provide enhanced mental health supports, develop early diversion programming at the intersection of intimate partner violence and gun violence, strengthen restorative reentry options for individuals and their families, expand pre-court eviction prevention initiatives, and pilot innovative programs that address pressing community needs across New York City. These initiatives represent thoughtful, evidence-based approaches that reduce unnecessary and harmful involvement in the justice system while advancing public safety through sustainable, community-driven solutions.

The Center for Justice Innovation has a long and well-documented history of conducting original research and implementing direct service programs that promote equality, dignity, and respect in communities across New York City, including Staten Island. These values closely align with the vision of the Richmond County District Attorney's Office. My office has proudly partnered with the Center in the development of the Staten Island Community Justice Center, an initiative designed to reduce crime and incarceration, strengthen community trust in the justice system, and promote safer, more equitable neighborhoods through community-driven public safety strategies, youth opportunity, and economic mobility initiatives.

To maintain existing operations while expanding programming, Justice Center staff will dedicate time and expertise to developing new initiatives, including designing data collection and evaluation strategies to measure program effectiveness and ensure accountability. Through this partnership, we continue to reimagine a more holistic and equitable approach to justice—one that emphasizes prevention, diversion, and meaningful community-based support alongside traditional court responses. Investment in the initiatives outlined above will allow this work to continue and expand its impact in Staten Island and throughout the city.

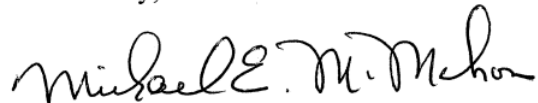
I also urge the Council to support **Youth Impact Staten Island**. Formerly known as Youth Court, Youth Impact is a dynamic youth leadership development program focused on peer mentorship, violence prevention, and restorative practices. The program works to keep young people engaged in school and out of the criminal legal system while fostering a youth-centered approach to community safety and healing. Through structured in-school partnerships and civic engagement opportunities, participants gain valuable skills in oral and written communication, facilitation, conflict resolution, and research. They also learn about the structure and impact of the justice system and receive training in community planning and organizing, empowering them to become leaders and advocates within their communities.

Continued investment is also critical to addressing the mental health needs of court-involved and at-risk youth. Individuals experiencing persistent and untreated mental illness must have access to culturally competent, trauma-informed mental health care. To address existing gaps in services for Staten Island youth, I urge the Council to continue and expand support for the Staten Island Justice Center's **Youth Wellness Initiative**. This program provides vital mental health services that promote healing and stability for young people involved in, or at risk of entering, the justice system. Importantly, the initiative also provides holistic support to families by offering resources and guidance to parents and caregivers of participating youth.

Finally, I support the continuation and expansion of the Center's **Driver Accountability Program**, which offers a constructive and restorative response to dangerous driving offenses. This program seeks to meaningfully change risky driving behavior among individuals charged with driving-related offenses in criminal court while promoting greater accountability and safer streets for all New Yorkers.

Thank you for your consideration of this request as the Council makes important funding decisions on behalf of the City of New York. If you have any questions, please contact Agency Chief Contracting Officer and Grants Coordinator Dr. Lisa Sloan at (718) 556-7089 or by email at Lisa.Sloan@rcda.nyc.gov.

Sincerely,



Michael E. McMahon
District Attorney



Testimony before the Committee on Children and Youth

On the The Preliminary Budget for FY2027

March 16, 2026

Good afternoon and thank you Chair Stevens and the Committee on Children and Youth for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Lauren Melodia, and I am an economist at The New School's Center for New York City Affairs. We conduct independent economic and labor market analysis to build better livelihoods for workers, families and communities in New York City.

My testimony today concerns the current and continued under-budgeting for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). There are currently 15,000 children from low-income families eligible for this subsidized child care program sitting on a waitlist, which impacts their parents' ability to go to work or school and build a life for their families in New York City.

Last year, the State and City did not put sufficient funds into this program and the waitlist is a result of those choices.

Today New York City's Mayor and the State's Governor have made a commitment to universal child care, and the Governor has increased State funding for this program. However, the funding in the State budget is not sufficient to make the program fully operating — as a public program parents can rely on. This threatens the viability of the program long-term and the family- and center-based child care programs that rely on CCAP recipients to have sufficient enrollment and keep their doors open to serve all children.

In this testimony, I provide independent estimates of the cost for the program in the near-term. I also point to additional sources of funding; there is still time for the City to advocate for additional matching funds from the State and there are other inefficiencies within the City budget that could easily be reallocated to meet CCAP demand. Lastly, I describe why this program is so critical to fund and maintain as the City develops a path to universal child care.

1. The cost of a fully operating CCAP program and current budget gaps

I estimate that New York City will need an additional \$1.21 billion in CCAP funding for federal fiscal years (FFY) 2026 and 2027 in order to make the CCAP voucher program “fully operating” with no waitlist. This includes an additional \$460 million added to the current FFY commitments

and an additional \$750 million added to Governor Hochul's Executive Budget proposal for the FFY2027.

A fully operating program would fulfill the program's mandate according to New York State law. It would meet the needs of the city's families earning less than 85% of State Median Income (SMI) in addition to families that are mandated to receive a CCAP voucher due to cash assistance work requirements.

Analysis of CCAP voucher funding need for FFY2026 (10/1/26 - 9/30/26): In total, the City will need an estimated \$2.26 billion in FFY2026 to cover a fully operating CCAP voucher program with no waitlist. According to NYC Comptroller's Checkbook NYC, the City has already spent \$610 million in the first 4 months of the federal fiscal year. Our estimates include serving existing enrolled families, cash assistance recipients currently coming into the program due to reinstatement of work requirements, and elimination of the waitlist starting in May 2026 after the State budget has passed, and a modest increase (based on current waitlist trends) in non-mandated families who are income eligible (earning 85% State Median Income or less) being served starting in August 2026 after the waitlist has been cleared.

Given this expected need, the City will need an additional \$460 million in FFY2026 to fund a fully operating CCAP voucher program with no waitlist. In SFY26, NYC was allocated [\\$1.1 billion](#) to spend in FFY26 (10/01/25 - 9/30/26) and access to an additional \$350 million provided the City offered a one-to-one match, for which the City's new Maintenance of Effort (MOE) of \$328 million could count. Provided the City takes advantage of the full match in FFY2026, this would total \$1.8 billion for the city to spend on the program, roughly \$450 million per quarter.

Analysis of CCAP voucher funding need for FFY2027 (10/1/26 - 9/30/27): In federal fiscal year (FFY) 2027 the City will need a total of \$3.16 billion to cover a fully operating CCAP voucher program with no waitlist. This estimate includes serving existing enrolled families, families already deemed eligible and currently on the waitlist, cash assistance recipients facing reinstatement of work requirements over the next year, and a modest increase in non-mandated families who are income eligible (earning 85% State Median Income or less) based on recent trends in waitlist growth.

For FFY2027, the City will need an additional \$750 million to fund a fully operating CCAP voucher program with no waitlist. Given that NYC currently receives 61% of CCBG allocations, we expect that Governor Hochul's Executive Budget proposal will amount to \$1.46 billion for CCBG funds, with an additional [\\$475 million available in match](#) (see page 313). The City will be required to contribute \$328 million in MOE. Therefore, if the City utilizes the full \$475 million in FY2027, it will have \$2.41 billion to spend on the program. This is \$750 million less than the \$3.16 billion need.

2. Sources to fill the CCAP funding gap

There is still time to advocate that the State provide additional matching dollars in the State FY2027 budget. An additional \$605 million in matching dollars for the City's CCBG allocation from the State and an additional \$605 million in the City budget across FFY2026 and FFY2027 will fill the gap. I strongly encourage the City Council and Mayor Mamdani to advocate for these changes before the State budget passes.

For the City match to this program, the City can reallocate funds from under-utilized DOE early care and education (ECE) programs. In City fiscal year (CFY) 2025, 26,658 DOE-contracted seats for infants, toddlers, 3- and 4-year olds were unfilled. 9,161 of these were for full-day, full year care (the remaining 17,497 were for school day/year care only). When combined with the [City's average reported cost per seat](#), the total budget for these seats was \$565.7 million (\$251.1 million for the full-day, full-year seats). These resources could be reallocated to help address the current CCAP waitlist.

It is also critical that the City Council monitor what, if any, attempts the administration is taking to place families on the CCAP waitlist into these DOE-contracted seats. To date, we have heard nothing publicly about efforts to increase collaboration and coordination between DOE and ACS programs. In the near and long-term, the City's budget for ECE programs can be made more efficient by better integrating DOE-contracted ECE programs and the CCAP voucher program. To start, ACS and DOE can work together now to contact families on the waitlist to determine if any empty DOE-contracted seats can meet their child care needs. City Council's attention to this matter is critical at this time.

3. Why CCAP is critical now and during a phase in to universal child care

With the Mayor's plan to build a universal child care system with no means-testing, it is unclear how the City will be able to utilize federal funds allocated by the State through the CCBG funds to guarantee low-income families are being served in the phase-in to universal child care (and without sufficient funding for a truly universal system). This is why a fully operational CCAP program is so critical at this time.

During the phase-in to universal child care, the City will need to integrate its universal Department of Education programs (2-K, 3-K and Pre-K) with the CCAP voucher program. If it fails to do so, the City will be managing a class-based child care system, not a universal one – where middle- and low-income families are being served through different programs with different quality standards. We expect the City will eventually integrate the two programs, which will lead to lower budget needs for CCAP in the long-term. (We are available to update these estimates for outyears with additional information about the City's integration plans.) However, given the status of the City's current path to universal child care, it is imperative that an

additional \$1.2 billion be secured through State and City budgets for the CCAP program in the interim.

While this funding is critical for serving low-income families now, it is also critical for stabilizing existing family- and center-based child care programs that will face upheaval as the City attempts to “age down the system” by establishing a universal child care program for 2-year-olds (2-K) over the next four years.

The Mamdani administration has demonstrated a preference for ECE to be provisioned through contracts administered by DOE. This choice risks destabilizing the family child care (FCC) sector in particular, the availability of infant care, and, in doing so, undermining the goal of providing universal child care in New York City.

Why CCAP is critical for stabilizing the supply of child care: [80% of licensed FCC providers in the City are not currently connected to the DOE](#). FCC programs that do not receive 2-K contracts will be left with unsustainable enrollment and financial structures, resulting in exponential collapse of the programs that currently sustain infant and toddler care. We have seen this take place before. From 2014 to 2019 when DOE rolled out the Pre-K and 3-K contracts, [the city lost 1,300 FCC and group \(GFCC\) programs](#).

Due to staffing ratios and a broken private market, those without DOE contracts are extremely reliant on enrolled 2-year-olds and CCAP voucher recipients. [70% of FCC and GFCC providers](#), including many that have DOE contracts, rely on CCAP vouchers to serve children in their care. The CCAP waitlist has created great uncertainty, stress, and cash flow problems for these providers, risking their closure.

If the City proceeds by making 2-K available through DOE contracts only, the majority of FCC and GFCC providers will automatically be excluded and will experience enrollment declines. This will compromise the city’s child care capacity for all ages, especially for infants. Removing 2-year-olds, in addition to the 3- and 4-year-olds already syphoned away from these programs, would require programs caring for infants to raise their private pay rates for infants, because they won’t be able to spread high infant staffing costs across all age groups as they currently do. Knowing the already untenable costs parents face, providers likely won’t be able to raise rates enough to offset the loss of toddler enrollment. More programs will close.

If the City is committed to building a universal ECE system, it must do what it can to stabilize these programs and prevent them from closing their doors today. One of the easiest and fastest ways to do this is to guarantee that families who qualify for the CCAP program can access CCAP vouchers, which are disproportionately utilized at FCC and GFCC programs. This will help to mitigate enrollment declines resulting from the creation of 2-K and stabilize existing, experienced and qualified child care programs that the City will need to serve demand generated by a universal child care system.



New York City Council
City Preliminary Budget Hearing - Children and Youth Services Committee
Testimony submitted by Michelle Avila, Director of Public Policy
Monday, March 16, 2026

On behalf of Children's Aid, I would like to thank Chair Althea Stevens and members of the Children and Youth Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Fiscal Year 2027 preliminary city budget.

For over 170 years, Children's Aid has been committed to ensuring that there are no boundaries to the aspirations of young people, and no limits to their potential. By offering a continuum of services throughout childhood, Children's Aid prepares young people to succeed at every level of education and every milestone of life. Today, nearly 2,000 dedicated full and part time staff members serve nearly 50,000 children, youth, and families across more than 40 sites in New York City. Through our early childhood centers, community schools, community hubs, and health clinics, Children's Aid creates trusted spaces where families can access the full range of supports they need, close to home.

In addition to direct service delivery, Children's Aid engages in policy and advocacy work at all levels of government. Our policy priorities are informed by what we know works for children and families and by the persistent barriers our organization and staff encounter while serving the one in four New York City children living in poverty. To this end, Children's Aid is a proud member of numerous city-level coalitions including the Campaign for Children (C4C), the Human Services Council, the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA), New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL) and Fair Futures. Through these networks and alliances, we fully support their policy agendas.

A thriving New York City requires a strong and dynamic ecosystem of programs that support children, youth, and families. The human services sector is essential to the City's social safety net, and organizations like Children's Aid are on the frontlines, partnering with government to ensure that communities remain resilient and empowered. As the City navigates ongoing fiscal uncertainty, we remain committed to caring for children and supporting families. Our work is critical, not just for today, but for building a stronger future for all New Yorkers.

However, our ability to provide these vital services is threatened by governmental decisions that disproportionately impact Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). Procurement delays, contracting issues, background check policies, RFP processes, and funding decisions at the city, state, and federal levels consistently undermine our financial stability and daily operations. In the face of ongoing economic and social instability, these systemic

challenges further constrain our ability to focus on delivering critical programs. As a large, long-established organization, Children's Aid is frequently impacted by these sector-wide issues. Smaller organizations—who are also doing essential work in communities across the city—are made especially vulnerable by these same challenges.

Across the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), we urge the Council to prioritize investments that strengthen prevention and family supports, expand access to high-quality opportunities for children, youth, and families, and stabilize the human services workforce. To support these goals, we respectfully recommend that the Council:

- **Protect and expand ACS prevention funding** and ensure contracts reflect the true cost of services.
- **Sustain and expand supports for youth with foster care experience**, including renewing and increasing funding for the Young Women's Initiative, which provides critical services for transition-age foster youth, and strengthening support for Fair Futures.
- **Fully fund child care assistance**, including matching state investments in CCAP vouchers and eliminating the current waitlist of 17,000 children.
- **Restore and expand Promise NYC to \$50 million** so children and families otherwise not eligible for child care assistance can receive care.
- **Strengthen youth development programs**, including COMPASS/SONYC afterschool, Summer Rising, Beacon and Cornerstone centers, and SYEP.
- **Increase investment in adult literacy programs**
- **Stabilize the human services workforce** through salary parity, wage increases, and annual cost-of-living adjustments.
- **Address operational barriers for providers**, including contracting delays, background clearance processing, and reimbursement policies.

I. Administration for Children Services (ACS)

Children's Aid remains deeply committed to building a child welfare system that keeps families safely together, reduces the racial and economic inequities that continue to shape system involvement, and partners meaningfully with communities. Poverty is too often mistaken for neglect, and Black and Brown families continue to be disproportionately reported, investigated, and separated. A stronger, more equitable child welfare system requires investments that address these root causes of instability and support families long before a crisis escalates.



We value our longstanding partnership with the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) and the City Council, and we recognize the progress the City has made in expanding prevention, prioritizing kinship, and increasing low-stigma access to help through Family Enrichment Centers. At the same time, the FY27 Preliminary Budget reflects both promising investments and areas of concern that directly impact our ability, as a provider, to stabilize families and serve children and youth effectively.

1. Supporting Mandated Services

As a contracted foster care and prevention provider for the NYC Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), Children’s Aid supports families through a continuum of critical services. In FY25, we served 941 youth through foster care programs, and 2,898 children and 1,349 families in preventive services. These services are foundational to family stability, safety, and long-term well-being.

In the FY27 Preliminary Budget, ACS’s Foster Care Services line increases by \$62 million, bringing the total to \$905 million, including \$263.1 million baselined to meet the State foster care mandate. These investments are essential, but their impact is limited without significant investment in the child welfare workforce responsible for delivering these services.

Children’s Aid, like nearly all ACS-contracted providers, faces persistent staffing challenges. In FY25, our Child Welfare and Family Services Division experienced an 11.8% vacancy rate, and a 29.5% turnover rate. Struggles to hire and retain staff are directly tied to salary disparities between community-based organizations, public sector agencies, and the private sector. These disparities, often totaling \$15,000–\$30,000 annually, make it extremely difficult to attract and retain qualified case planners, clinicians, and social workers. These gaps undermine the quality and stability of care: research shows that every case planner turnover can extend a young person’s stay in foster care by 6 to 18 months, delaying permanency and compounding trauma.

To meet the needs of children in care, we join COFCCA in urging the Council to:

- Invest in workforce stabilization across foster care, including retention supports, and tuition assistance
- Ensure foster care and preventive contracts reflect true operating costs, including inflation, supervision, transportation, insurance, and safety-related requirements.

2. Prevention Services

Prevention remains one of the most effective and cost-efficient strategies for promoting family stability and reducing entries into foster care. In New York City, the number of children who came into foster care declined 10% from 2022 to 2025.¹ Today, fewer than 6,500 NYC children and youth are in foster care, compared to nearly 45,000 in the 1990s.² These meaningful declines are due in part to investments in prevention. At Children's Aid, 99% of families engaged in our prevention services do not enter care, reflecting both the strength of the model and the deep trust families place in community-based supports.

The City must continue investing in prevention programming and the staffing that makes these services possible. Prevention contracts, now approaching year six of a nine-year term, have not received the salary and rate updates needed to match rising labor costs, rental increases, and the operational realities of today's nonprofit sector. As a result, vacancies remain high, slots go unfilled, and families experience longer wait times. These challenges are structural, not reflective of reduced need.

We urge the Council to:

- Protect and expand investments in ACS prevention programs, and
- Invest in salary adjustments and contract right-sizing to stabilize the prevention workforce and ensure families receive timely, high-quality support.

3. Wrap-Around Support for Transitional-Aged Foster Youth

Through the City Council's Young Women's Initiative, Children's Aid, alongside Graham Windham and Forestdale, provides flexible, wrap-around supports to transition-age youth with foster care experience and systems involvement. This initiative enables our coaches and credible messengers to deliver rapid, individualized assistance, including housing support, food, emergency financial aid, workforce readiness, and connections to long-term services for an underserved population. City Council funding allows each agency to expand Life Coaching services for youth ages 13–26 in partnership with community-based organizations. It also strengthens workforce pathways, including paid internships, and provides emergency financial assistance for housing, food, and other urgent needs.

This funding is unique: it reaches youth regardless of their foster care agency of origin and fills critical gaps not covered by Fair Futures, which—while essential—does not fully meet the needs of older youth or those who have already transitioned out of care. Fair Futures funding for ages 21–26 is tied to the number of youth currently in care, leaving many former foster youth without access to coaching, internship stipends, or comprehensive

¹ ACS Strategic Priorities Fall 2025 ://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/about/2025/strategic-priorities-fall-2025-2026.pdf

² Ibid



college success services. It also provides only partial support for trauma-informed mental health care, resulting in significant unmet needs across the city. With nearly 1,000 young people exiting foster care each year, sustaining this investment is vital. This flexible model addresses gaps left by existing funding streams and represents exactly the kind of low-barrier, high-impact investment that promotes stability and prevents further marginalization and crisis.

We respectfully ask the Council to renew and expand this initiative, ensuring continuity and reach across all boroughs.

4. Strengthening Supports for Older Youth with a Foster Care Background

Children's Aid is a proud partner of Fair Futures, through which youth ages 11-26 in foster care and those aging out, receive long-term coaching, academic supports, and workforce development services. Coaching is the backbone of youth stability and equity; sustained relationships improve on-time grade progression, high school completion, post-secondary persistence, and employment readiness. We commend the City for baselining Fair Futures and urge continued protection and growth of this investment in FY27.

Alongside Fair Futures, Children's Aid partners on initiatives that remove remaining barriers to persistence, including College Choice, Career Choice/Workforce Ready, Girls Just Us, and Assertive Community Engagement & Success (ACES).

At our Next Generation Center (NGC) in the South Bronx, Children's Aid operates Fair Futures coaching for approximately 100 youth ages 13-26 from across the five boroughs, in addition to supporting transition-age youth with Young Women's Initiative (YWI) funding. NGC is also a Community Center and Boys & Girls Club serving over 300 youth ages 14-26, integrating education, workforce, and mental health supports in one trusted space. Our work focuses on two primary goals: 1) connecting youth to positive influences (school, work, and relationships with caring adults); and 2) diverting youth from negative influences (crime and incarceration).

We ask the Council to sustain and expand funding for Fair Futures, and protect investments in coaching, education, housing supports, and mental health services for youth 13-26.

5. Foster Youth Success Alliance

Children's Aid proudly houses the Fostering Youth Success Alliance (FYSA), a statewide coalition advocating for responsive policies and programs that support youth with foster care experience. FYSA leads the annual Foster Youth Shadow Day, which brings young



people to City Hall to share their stories directly with policymakers. We deeply appreciate the Council's ongoing partnership in making this event possible.

We encourage the Council to continue supporting FYSA and its citywide policy priorities, which are aligned with the needs expressed by youth and families throughout the child welfare system.

5. Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) and CCAP Vouchers:

Child care vouchers are a critical support for working families, helping parents afford care so they can remain in the workforce while ensuring their children are in safe, stable learning environments. However, demand for vouchers in New York City far exceeds available funding. ACS recently reported that roughly 17,000 children are on the City's waitlist for Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) vouchers after the City stopped enrolling new families due to funding constraints in May 2025.

As the state finalizes its annual investment in the CCAP program, it is critical that the City ensure sufficient funding is available to match state resources and fully support eligible families. At the same time, programs like Promise NYC play a vital role in filling gaps for families who are not eligible for federally funded assistance.

Children's Aid urges the Council to:

- **Ensure the City provides sufficient funding to match state investments in CCAP vouchers and eliminate the current waitlist.** With 17,000 children currently waiting for assistance, expanding voucher access would provide immediate relief for working families and help stabilize the city's child care system.
- **Restore and expand funding for Promise NYC at \$50 million to provide assistance for children otherwise not eligible for child care assistance.** Last year, this program was funded at \$25 million and served 1,071 families. Restoring and expanding funding will ensure that even more families can access affordable child care and fully participate in the workforce.

6. Transportation Needs of Students in Foster Care

Timely transportation is essential for foster youth to attend school, a critical place of stability. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Fostering Connections Act mandate that local school districts and child welfare agencies collaborate to ensure that students remain in their original schools when they enter foster care or change placements, unless it is not in their best interest to do so.

While the New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) Office for Students in Foster Care has made significant progress in addressing transportation needs, considerable challenges remain. Students frequently wait weeks or even months for bus routes to be assigned, creating substantial barriers to their education. The primary issue with the NYCPS Office of Pupil Transportation is the excessive wait time between requesting a route and actually being assigned one. To mitigate this delay, NYCPS has implemented ride vouchers, but caregivers are unable to utilize the vouchers until they have waited a minimum of 10 days for a bus route.

During this waiting period, an adult must accompany the student. However, since many foster parents are either employed or have other children in the home, the responsibility for transporting these children often falls on child welfare staff. This diversion of child welfare resources is problematic, as it pulls staff away from their crucial roles in supporting family permanency.

At Children's Aid, we have made considerable efforts to ensure that children can attend school, but this has come at a significant financial cost and has led to staff burnout. Staff members often begin their days as early as 4:00 am to transport children to school before continuing their full workday. This not only contributes to staff fatigue but also diverts them from their core responsibilities. Moreover, there are serious safety concerns as staff are tasked with navigating transportation for students during this interim period. For example, students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) that include transportation as a safety requirement are often transported by staff, putting both the students and staff at risk. One of our Education Specialists was involved in a severe car accident shortly after dropping a student off at school. She was devastated by the thought that the child could have been in the car at the time. The car was totaled, and the employee was out on disability for an extended period.

Additionally, just a few months ago, a new case planner was charged with escorting a child with special needs to school when the child broke free and ran toward a busy intersection. The case planner, understandably shaken by the incident, resigned shortly thereafter. These examples highlight not only the financial burden and the loss of valuable human resources but also the dangers posed by the lack of safe transportation options. It is perplexing that this issue has not been made a priority. This is not merely a matter of convenience; it is a matter of safety.

Financially, while the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) provides a \$200 daily transportation allotment, actual costs can reach up to \$600 per day, excluding the cost of staff time, and there is often a long wait for reimbursement. In response, Children's Aid is hiring additional staff specifically for transportation and acquiring more vehicles for staff use. However, when bus routes are delayed, both students and the families we serve



suffer, as the divided attention of case planning teams undermines their ability to provide consistent support.

Practical solutions exist: contracting with vetted transportation providers that do not require chaperones (such as Kid Car or HopSkipDrive), using ACS or other city vehicles with escorts, creating a dedicated interim transportation service for students awaiting bus routes, hiring aides to accompany rideshares, or at minimum reimbursing chaperone costs and increasing the daily cap.

We urge the City to invest \$3 million to provide interim transportation for students in foster care awaiting bus service, ensuring uninterrupted access to school at a critical moment in their lives.

II. Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD)

Children's Aid holds over 50 contracts with the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), including contracts through the city's Comprehensive Afterschool System (COMPASS), Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), Deaf and Hard of Hearing program, adult literacy programs, Saturday Night Lights, and Beacon.

We know that enriching and accessible youth programs are a vital component of a healthy city. For children and youth ages 5–18, high-quality afterschool, summer and work development programs are foundational to academic success, social-emotional development, and safety. And, for working families, the hours between 3:00–6:00 PM and the summer months represent some of the greatest child care gaps. Reliable, affordable out-of-school time programming strengthens family economic stability—particularly for low-income families—as it relieves families from making the difficult choices between employment and supervision.

To help alleviate the affordability crisis for working families with children, the City must continue to invest in child and youth-serving programs. While we were thrilled to see the Preliminary budget reflect deepened investments in programs like COMPASS and Summer Rising, we call on the Council to further investment in other essential programs like SYEP and Beacon, while reducing administrative burdens for providers and investing in workforce development and pay.

1. COMPASS and SONYC:



Children's Aid operates 17 DYCD COMPASS and SONYC afterschool programs, serving over 3,100 youth. These programs take place in our five community centers and across the majority of our 19 community schools.

As an afterschool provider, we know firsthand that these programs are a critical lifeline for New York City families, forming the foundation of their support systems. These programs address pressing issues including learning loss, social-emotional development, workforce readiness, and the need for reliable hours to support working parents. According to the Afterschool Alliance, 90% of parents report that their child's afterschool program helps them interact with peers and develop social skills, while 82% say it boosts their confidence and 73% say it fosters responsible decision-making. Moreover, regular attendance in quality afterschool programs is linked to higher standardized test scores and improved school attendance.

The evidence is clear: high-quality, accessible programs delivered by community-based organizations in partnership with DYCD are essential to the success of New York City's young people.

However, these programs can only succeed if contracts allow providers to fairly compensate staff, manage administrative requirements, and offer programming that meets the full range of community needs. Without thoughtful implementation, the expansion of afterschool programming risks placing unsustainable financial pressure on providers and creating inequities across the system.

While we are encouraged that the Preliminary Budget includes funding for afterschool expansion, the current reimbursement structure is insufficient to sustain high-quality programming. The per-participant rates proposed in the new COMPASS RFP—approximately \$6,800 for full-year COMPASS and \$3,900 for school-year SONYC—would allow providers to recover only about 60–70% of program costs in the first year, with the gap widening over the six-year contract due to the absence of annual cost escalators. As a result, providers must either subsidize programs with other funding sources or offer staff wages that do not reflect their responsibilities and expertise, creating inequities in the quality and stability of programming available to families across neighborhoods.

Recognizing the disruption of service delivery that would result from pulling the current RFP, we are not calling on the Administration to alter the base rates. However, we do urge the City to pursue complementary solutions that reduce administrative burdens for providers, promote equitable implementation of afterschool expansion, and move the system toward long-term financial stability.

To that end, we urge the Council to work with DYCD on the following:

- **Release contract awards for the most recent COMPASS RFP** as soon as possible so providers can plan for programming beginning in August 2026.
- **Include annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) in all new contracts** to prevent the erosion of wages and operating budgets over time.
- **Reimburse providers for their approved indirect cost rates (ICRs)**, rather than defaulting to de minimis or capped rates that understate actual overhead.
- **Invest in a long-term transition toward a year-round out-of-school-time system** that seamlessly integrates afterschool and summer programming.
- **Prioritize access for students** in temporary housing, foster care, English language learners, and students with disabilities, including
 - Investing in the City's capital plan to ensure youth-serving facilities are ADA accessible.
 - Supporting paraprofessional staffing in afterschool programs to ensure continuity for students who require services during both the school day and afterschool hours.

2. Summer Rising:

Every child deserves access to high-quality, enriching summer programming that meets their individual needs. In recent years, Summer Rising has become one of the few free, widely available summer options for New York City families, providing both academic enrichment and a critical child care solution for working parents during the summer months.

Children's Aid was encouraged to see the Preliminary Budget baseline \$126 million for Summer Rising, recognizing the importance of stable and predictable support for summer programming. Continued investment in this program is essential to ensure families can rely on high-quality summer opportunities year after year.

However, while Summer Rising has significantly expanded access to summer programming, providers continue to experience operational challenges that limit the program's effectiveness and create barriers for both families and community-based organizations.

To strengthen Summer Rising and ensure it continues to meet the needs of youth and families, we respectfully urge the Council to work with DYCD on the following:

- **Improved enrollment systems and provider flexibility.** The current centralized enrollment system managed by New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) does not integrate effectively with DYCD Connect, creating challenges for CBOs in managing enrollment and attendance. Creating a centralized enrollment system would make it

easier for providers to enroll students on-site and manage waitlists to ensure program slots are fully utilized.

- **Consistent paraprofessional staffing:** DYCD and NYCPS must ensure paraprofessionals are available for the full duration of summer programming so students who require additional support can fully participate.
- **Strengthen early planning, coordination, and communication across agencies:** Establish a full-time team to work across DYCD, NYCPS, and provider organizations to support early planning and coordination for Summer Rising. This investment would ensure schools and CBOs are made aware of student needs in advance and that families receive clear, accessible information by February, enabling effective program design and a seamless and impactful experience for students.

3. Beacon and Cornerstone

Significant disparities in funding and support across different types of summer programs must be addressed to ensure equity. Center-based programs—including Beacons and Cornerstones—serve as vital community hubs and often operate for longer hours than school-based programs, making them especially valuable for working families.

Children's Aid operates a Beacon program at our Charles Drew campus in the Bronx, and this school-based community center serves roughly 600 children and adults annually. Our Beacon operates as a true community hub, that is highly trusted and well known by families in the area and available during accessible hours; the center remains open until 10:00 PM on weekdays and from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM on weekends, with additional summer safety programming extending hours until 11:00 PM, seven days a week.

Additionally, because Beacons are required to host hundreds of events annually, this center leverages strong partnerships with city initiatives and other community-based organizations to deliver a wide range of events and services. These include ESL classes, open gym and team sports, mentorship programs, dance and drama programs, SYEP-connected workforce workshops, and special events like field trips, holiday fairs and clothing drives. The Beacon also connects families to critical supports such as health and mental health services and food access, serving thousands of community members each year through pantry services alone. Together, this breadth of programming and extended availability positions the Beacon as a consistent, high-impact resource for the entire neighboring community—not just an afterschool program for school-aged youth.

Despite strong demand, center-based programs frequently receive lower reimbursement rates than school-based programs within the Summer Rising initiative. And, the preliminary budget proposes decreased spending on these programs in FY27.

We urge the Council to work with DYCD to address these inequities by:

- **Increasing reimbursement rates for center-based programs** to reflect the true cost of delivering quality services
- **Offering additional funding opportunities to meet demand**, including expanding program slots.
- **Including center-based programs in planning and resource allocation**, with equal access to resources and support as Summer Rising programs.

4. Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)

The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) is transformative for the young people it serves, many of whom receive their first paid work experience through the program. In FY25, SYEP served 97,000 youth citywide – and, through support from this program, Children’s Aid was able to match over 3,400 young people with paid work opportunities.

While the City has made significant progress in expanding access to SYEP in recent years, demand continues to far exceed available slots. In FY25, the program served only 53% of eligible applicants, leaving nearly half of interested youth without access to this critical opportunity. At the same time, the FY27 Preliminary Budget reflects an investment approximately \$21 million below the February 2026 Financial Plan, raising concerns that this gap could widen rather than shrink.

SYEP is an investment in young people’s long-term success. Expanding access and reducing barriers to participation will ensure that more youth can gain meaningful work experience, build critical skills, and develop pathways to future employment.

To build on the success of SYEP and ensure that more young people can access and benefit from the program, Children’s Aid recommends the following:

- **Increase investment in SYEP** to expand the number of available slots and better meet demand among eligible youth.
- **Fund OMNY cards for SYEP participants** to ensure reliable transportation to worksites and remove cost barriers to participation.
- **Provide child care supports for SYEP participants**, including child care waivers and related assistance, to ensure youth with caregiving responsibilities can fully participate.
- **Allow younger participants to earn hourly wages instead of a fixed stipend.** The current \$700 stipend is no longer competitive and can limit participation; transitioning to hourly wages would improve engagement and equity across age groups.

5. Adult Literacy Programs

Adult literacy education is a critical pathway to economic opportunity and community integration for New Yorkers. Through DYCD's Adult Literacy initiative and Adult Literacy Forward, Children's Aid is able to provide instruction and programs to roughly 225 adult learners annually across our community school campuses in Washington Heights. Through English language instruction, digital literacy training, high school equivalency preparation, and civics education, these programs help adults gain the skills they need to participate fully in the workforce and civic life.

Across New York City, the need for adult literacy services is both significant and growing. Approximately 2.2 million city residents need adult literacy instruction, and more than 75% of these students are immigrants. Despite this need, the funding landscape for adult literacy is increasingly uncertain. The City currently invests approximately \$103.5 million across federal, state, and local funding streams, including more than \$24 million from the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. However, the Trump administration has previously proposed eliminating WIOA Title II, which could significantly reduce access to services.

Without proactive City investment, these changes could result in fewer program slots, reduced services, and diminished access for New Yorkers seeking to build skills and participate fully in the workforce.

To support adult learners and protect access to these critical services, we join the New York City Adult Literacy Coalition (NYCCAL) in recommending the following investments:

- **Create a new \$20 million city funding stream for adult literacy through Education for Integration and Equity.** This investment would expand access to English language, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency, and civics education classes for New Yorkers who might otherwise be ineligible for services and help offset potential federal funding losses.
- **Increase City Council discretionary funding for adult literacy from \$14.5 million to \$18 million.** Council discretionary funding has become a vital source of support for the 63 community-based organizations, CUNY colleges, and library programs that provide adult literacy services. Increasing this funding would allow these programs to serve thousands more adults in need.
- **Consolidate City Council discretionary adult literacy initiatives under Adult Literacy Forward.** Adult Literacy Forward is a nationally recognized and innovative funding model that has demonstrated strong outcomes since its launch as a City Council pilot in FY22. Consolidating Council-funded adult literacy initiatives under



this model would streamline program requirements, improve coordination, and allow the City Council to track outcomes through the NYC RISE data system.

In total, these investments would increase City funding for adult literacy from \$26.5 million to \$50 million, allowing around 7,000 more adults to receive services.

6. Runaway and Homeless Youth

While Children's Aid is not a direct provider of Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) shelters, we see the consequences of a system that is under-resourced and unable to meet the scale of need. Across New York City, there are not enough RHY beds or supportive services to ensure that young people experiencing homelessness have a safe place to go. As a result, far too many youth—particularly older youth—are forced into unsafe and unstable living situations and remain at high risk of prolonged homelessness.

We join RHY providers and advocates in urging the City to take immediate action to strengthen and stabilize the RHY system by:

- **Expand housing capacity for older youth ages 21-24**, ensuring that all 100 planned beds for this population are brought online (currently only 60 beds are operational).
- **Increase RHY bed rates** to accurately reflect the true cost of operating shelter beds and ensure providers can deliver safe, high-quality services. In addition, release the pending Request for Proposals to procure the full RHY shelter system.
- **Baseline \$1.6 million for Peer Navigators**, who provide mentorship, advocacy, and connections to critical services for youth and young adults navigating the DYCD RHY continuum.
- **Baseline \$1.6 million for Housing Navigators** to support youth in securing stable housing and transitioning successfully out of shelter settings.

III. Additional Operational Challenges & Recommendations

In addition to the programmatic investments outlined above, several operational challenges continue to limit the ability of community-based organizations to deliver services effectively. Addressing these issues will strengthen program implementation, support providers, and ensure that youth and families receive consistent, high-quality services.

1. Background Clearances

To ensure that Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) can effectively fill vacancies and provide uninterrupted services to youth and families, it is essential that the background clearance process be expedited. While the implementation of the Fingerprint and Application Management System (FAMS) has led to improvements, delays and communication gaps in the clearance process continue to hinder providers' ability to hire staff and fully staff programs in a timely manner.

When staff clearances are delayed, programs may be forced to operate understaffed or postpone services, which ultimately affects the youth and families who rely on these programs.

To address these challenges, we urge the Council to work with DYCD and other relevant agencies on the following:

- **Further streamline the background clearance process** to ensure faster processing times so providers can fill vacancies quickly and maintain adequate staffing levels.
- **Improve communication with CBOs** by providing consistent and timely updates when applications encounter issues or delays, allowing providers to resolve problems quickly and avoid unnecessary disruptions.

Improving the efficiency and transparency of the clearance process will allow CBOs to maintain staffing levels and continue providing high-quality services without interruption.

2. Contract Payments

Human service providers continue to face significant delays in contracting, which harm both nonprofit organizations and the communities they serve. Because the City only reimburses providers once contracts are registered, organizations are often forced to begin work without payment or delay the start of critical services. Both scenarios create operational and financial strain for providers and disrupt services for families.

These delays place significant pressure on nonprofit organizations, many of which must take on lines of credit to cover operating costs while awaiting reimbursement. Interest payments divert limited resources away from program delivery, and in some cases, providers are forced to reduce staff, scale back services, or close programs entirely.

Delays in contract registration or amendment processing can also prevent providers from fully utilizing allocated funds. If programming cannot begin until a contract is registered, organizations may not have enough time within the fiscal year to spend the full budget.

Similarly, late amendments can limit providers' ability to shift funds to address evolving program needs.

To address these challenges, we urge the Council to work with the Administration to:

- **Immediately pay all outstanding invoices for DYCD programs** so that organizations are paid for the services they already provided before any new programs are implemented.
- **Ensure timely contract registration and reimbursement**, allowing providers to begin programming on schedule and operate programs effectively throughout the fiscal year.
- **Make partial invoice payments** a standard practice across agencies.
- **Fully launch and expand ContractStat** to track delays in the contracting process from start to finish, including payments.
- **Invest in structural improvements** to PASSport.
- **Increase contract processing capacity** and increase headcounts at human services agencies to enable timely contract management.

Timely contracting is essential to ensuring that youth-serving programs operate smoothly and that communities receive the services they depend on.

3. Human Services Staff Retention

Like many human services providers, Children's Aid is experiencing high turnover among frontline staff—including social workers, teachers, education professionals, and mental health practitioners—who are leaving for sectors that offer higher pay. Current contracts do not provide adequate compensation for youth workers, making it difficult for providers to remain competitive in the labor market.

Without targeted investments in the youth services workforce, providers will continue to struggle to recruit and retain qualified staff, which directly affects the quality and stability of programs available to young people and families. Human service workers are predominantly female (66%), with over two-thirds being full-time workers of color (68%) and nearly half (46%) women of color. Investing in this workforce is therefore critical not only to maintaining strong youth services but also to addressing persistent racial and gender wage disparities.

To strengthen the youth services workforce, we urge the Council to work with DYCD and ACS to:

- **Raise base wages** in human service contracts to reflect current inflation and establish an appropriate wage floor for both part-time and full-time workers, enabling providers to offer competitive salaries and retain qualified staff.
- **Include annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs)** in all contracts to prevent future erosion of wages and operating budgets.
- **Reimburse providers for their approved indirect cost rates (ICRs)** rather than defaulting to de minimis or capped rates that understate actual overhead.
- **Provide resources to support staff retention strategies**, including retention bonuses and professional development opportunities.

Investing in the youth services workforce will help ensure that programs remain staffed by experienced professionals who can meet the complex needs of the children and families they serve.

IV. Closing

We recognize the challenges the City faces in meeting the needs of its young people, but we believe that balancing the budget should not come at the expense of our children and families. Children's Aid sincerely thanks the New York City Council for its unwavering support of children, youth, families, and communities in the city. We look forward to continuing our partnership to advance these critical issues.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on these crucial issues. Please feel free to contact me at mavila@childrensaidnyc.org with any questions regarding this testimony.



Testimony of Caitlyn Passaretti and Jenny Veloz
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Submitted to the New York City Council FY'2027 Preliminary Budget Oversight Hearing
Children and Youth Services Committee
March 16, 2026

For 80 years, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC) has been an independent voice for children advancing child and family well-being through research, advocacy, and civic engagement. With deep expertise in data, policy and child-serving systems, CCC champions proven solutions and mobilizes allies to secure reforms that improve child outcomes and promote equity. CCC drives systemic change to ensure every child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

Thank you, Chair Stevens and members of the City Council Children and Youth Committee, for holding today's important hearing on the Mayor's FY27 Preliminary Budget. CCC's priorities outlined below center on necessary investments that can improve access to essential youth programming and family services with demonstrated outcomes in youth development, economic security, and community support networks.

Invest in Youth Opportunity and Youth Services

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

CCC, a co-leader of the Campaign for Children, urges the City to release the new COMPASS awards from the 2025 RFP process as soon as possible. Notice of awards will allow providers to adequately plan programming and service provision. Additionally, we urge the city leaders to remain committed to the expansion of afterschool with accompanying necessary supports for the workforce.

Adequately funded programs are necessary to make meaningful impact for children, youth, and families and critical to ensure free and affordable, high-quality afterschool options for children and youth. **CCC urges the City to update the COMPASS and SONYC provider rates to ensure they adequately compensate providers and enable the City to achieve its goal of fully funded elementary and middle school programs.**

Enhance Summer Programming Efficiency

CCC supports the baselined restoration of the \$19.6 million for the DYCD Summer Rising programs in the Preliminary Budget, as well as a \$26.2 million increase over FY27 for NYCPS Summer Rising programs. Early funding restorations ensure program stability and allow city agencies and nonprofit providers to address persistent issues that challenge Summer Rising programs.

Additionally, we urge the City to address the following operational issues to ensure summer programming serves families and youth as effectively as possible:

- **Return to community-based enrollment with nonprofit providers instead of New York City Public Schools:** Currently, NYCPS’s system does not successfully integrate with the program used by DYCD, making it challenging for CBOs to manage enrollment or update waitlists. Returning to community-based enrollment with CBOs will allow on-site enrollment and waitlists management, thus ensuring effective use of available capacity.
- **Address workforce shortages:** Limited and inconsistent availability of paraprofessionals during summer programming significantly limits access for students with disabilities.
- **Provide Clear Communication:** Communication between NYC Public Schools, the Department of Health, and CBOs remains unclear, especially regarding critical staffing needs, background checks, enrollment, and updated regulations. Improved coordination is essential to the smooth operation of summer programs.
- **Minimize Program Relocations:** Relocating programs to new buildings, especially when CBO staff lack prior relationships, disrupts years of trust and collaboration between CBOs and schools, and can often lead to competition for space with other co-located CBOs. We strongly recommend minimizing relocations and ensuring adequate time and support for CBOs and NYCPS staff to plan and acclimate to new settings when relocation is unavoidable.

Finally, we urge the City to expand summer programs options for families. Limiting options to only school-based models results in inequitable access and limits alignment with youth and family preferences for full-day camp options with more flexible programming. We look forward to collaborating with city leaders to support and expand models that better meet the needs of families and provide enriching programming for youth.

Enhance Services for Systems-Involved Youth and Families

Ensure Transportation for Youth in Foster Care

While both federal and state law require the City to provide transportation to students in foster care so they can remain in their original schools, New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) currently does not guarantee any form of transportation to students in foster care. It can take weeks or even months for NYCPS to arrange bus service causing disruptions for students in foster care sometimes forcing school or foster home transfers to access an education. In fact, during the 2024-25 school year, 55% of students in foster care were chronically absent—missing at least one out of every ten school days—and one in five transferred schools at least once.

The City should invest \$3 million to provide interim transportation for students in foster care awaiting bus service, ensuring uninterrupted access to school at a critical time.

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

Extensive research demonstrates the positive impacts of Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) and reentry programs, including lowering recidivism and crime.¹ Moreover, studies estimate between \$3.46-\$5.54 in

¹ Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice. ATI Report. Accessed: <https://criminaljustice.cityofnewyork.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/MOCJ-ATI-RNR-Report-2019.pdf>

returns for every dollar invested in ATI programs in addition to reduced costs for the criminal justice system and better community health outcomes.²

Despite the well-established benefits of these programs, since 2023, the City Administration has cut millions from probation programs proven to support re-entry by connecting young people to mentorship and services. Failing to provide robust reentry services or supportive probation programs will harm youth and is counterproductive to building safe communities.

CCC supports the recommendations of the [New York City Youth Justice Coalition](#), including the following investments and restorations in the FY27 Budget:

- Restore and invest \$4.1 million for the IMPACT program
- Restore and baseline \$5 million for the NextSTEPS program
- Invest \$40 million for the Community Justice Reentry Network
- Baseline \$2.4 million with a cost-of-living adjustment to each new year of funding for the Mentoring and Advocacy Program (MAAP)
- Invest \$30 million for NYC’s Assertive Community Engagement and Success (ACES) program to ensure that all young people with risk factors have access to this kind of prevention model
- Maintain current funding for Family Court Alternative to Detention Programs to ensure young people and their families are successfully supported in the community.
- Expand Parent Support Services and create an open door policy for Family Support Services for youth as a prevention intervention
- Invest \$8.1 million for the Anti-Gun Violence Employment Program
- Invest \$8.5 million to reinstate, expand and fully fund YES services with original work scope as an effective impactful preventive tool
- Invest \$59.1 million for ATLAS funding
- Invest \$1.6 billion to raise the Cost-Per-Participant funding for youth in detention in COMPASS programming
- Invest \$3.2 million for NeON program funding
- Invest \$3.7 million for the WorksPlus Program
- Restore and baseline \$130,000 for the Adolescent Portable Therapy

Deepen Investments in the Runaway and Homeless Youth System

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

Furthermore, we also urge the city to **restore and baseline \$1.6 million to maintain funding for the Peer Navigator positions and \$1.6 million for the housing specialists in the DYCD-RHY System.**

² New York State Alternatives to Incarceration and Reentry Coalition (2024). Unlocking Potential: The Role of Community-Based Alternatives in Strengthening Public Safety. Accessed: https://www.lac.org/assets/files/Unlocking-Potential_The-Role-of-Community-Based-Alternatives-in-Strengthening-Public-Safety.pdf

The housing and youth services systems are complex, and it is critical to have a trusted support person to offer advice, resources, and answers for young people trying to navigate the system.

Finally, we want to alert the City Council that national advocates warn that potential federal cuts to the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) can result in all upstate RHY shelters closing further straining NYC youth shelters. It is essential we advocate for the continuation of funding for upstate shelters, as the NYC system is not equipped to meet the needs of homeless youth in both within and outside of the city. Collective advocacy at the state-level is essential to maintain funding for upstate shelters, as the NYC system is not equipped to meet the needs.

Invest in Child Welfare Primary Prevention and Workforce Stability

Fundamental to preventing child welfare involvement is investing in the primary prevention supports families need to be safe and secure, including housing, child care, healthy food, and economic supports. At the same time, the prevention workforce currently in place to support families is in crisis. [In 2025, CCC and the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies \(COFCCA\) surveyed prevention services providers](#) to better understand the challenges facing families involved in the child welfare system and providers' ability to serve them. Our results echoed the need for upstream prevention and workforce stabilization.

To help ensure that prevention services can best serve children and families, we recommend the following:

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

Support Families in Need of Child Care

Promise NYC provides childcare assistance to low-income families who may be ineligible for other, federally funded subsidized childcare. We are disappointed that this year's Preliminary Budget does not restore \$25 million for Promise NYC. Though some families served through PromiseNYC may receive services through recent 3-K and 2-K expansions, PromiseNYC offers care to a wider scope of families that may not find care through other pathways. The program offers flexibility to enable families to access services regardless of geography or age of child. **We therefore strongly urge city leaders to increase and baseline \$50 million in funding for Promise NYC to strengthen child care access for all NYC families.**

Preserving Child Care Voucher Access

In recent years, New York City and other counties have used Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) funds to significantly expand the number of families receiving child care assistance. CCBG funds support child care assistance for families on cash assistance; contracted child care for children 0-2 year olds and 3-and 4-year-olds in extended day/year; and child care vouchers for low-income working families and those engaged in training or other qualified activities. Last year, the City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) projected a funding shortfall for families applying for child care vouchers through the

state's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). Despite the state allocating \$350 million in one-time funding to address this shortfall, thousands of New York City children were placed on waitlists.

Although Governor Hochul's FY27 Executive Budget includes increased investments for CCAP, including \$475 million in one-time funding for New York City, this funding will be insufficient to completely eliminate the waitlist. As of January 2026, there were approximately 16,000 children and their families waiting for services.³ Families on waitlists will have to make difficult decisions to ensure that care for their children, including relying on family members to fill the gap, leaving their jobs or reducing employment hours, or putting additional economic strain on already struggling households. **The Administration must continue working with the State to ensure sufficient funding for child care vouchers and prepare to address shortfalls with city funding.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

³ Gothamist. "Universal child care may be coming to NYC, but 16,000 kids are stuck waiting for aid." January 2026. <https://gothamist.com/news/universal-child-care-may-be-coming-to-nyc-but-16000-kids-are-stuck-waiting-for-aid>



**NYC Council Committee on Children & Youth
FY 27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Monday, March 16th, 2026**

Testimony Submitted by the Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)

Thank you, Chair Stevens and the Committee on Children & Youth, for offering an opportunity for social service partners and community stakeholders to present testimony on the city budget in relation to the programming and services that are delivered across NYC in service of families and children. We appreciate the collective work on the ACS and DYCD budgets to ensure maximum reach and impact of funding and services, and particularly ensuring continuation, baselining, and growth of programs where possible. The Committee for Hispanic Children & Families, better known by its acronym, CHCF, works in partnership with the city and state to deliver wrap-around services within schools, early care and learning programs, and the wider communities that we serve across NYC, through and beyond our contracted programs and services. Our continued mission is to combine education, capacity-building, and advocacy to strengthen the support system and continuum of learning for children and youth from birth through school-age.

School-Based Youth Development Programming

Our Youth Development team delivers after-school programming in partnership with three schools in the Bronx and career and college readiness programming to high school juniors and seniors at four schools in Manhattan and the Bronx. During a typical school and contract year, CHCF's after-school programs have a typical capacity to reach 550 students, and by extension their families. Above and beyond culturally and linguistically responsive academic instruction, CHCF programs provide comprehensive support that promote students' mental health and social emotional development, and foster student interest and career exploration. Our academic enrichment curriculum expands upon day-school learning, allowing students to engage in STEM and the arts through clubs such as robotics, esports, photography, and health and fitness – ensuring that students are inspired and equipped with 21st century skills. Our commitment extends beyond the classroom as we connect students and families with vital resources and community partnerships that strengthen their overall well-being and prospects.

Two of our programs were primarily funded by the state through the previous Advantage and Empire State After School contracts. While the state listened to advocates about the need to merge the funding streams and create equitable funding for all seats, the state failed to increase the budget allocation in FY25 budget to ensure that program capacity was sustained, and has continued to hold funding at inadequate levels to fund all of the programs that were approved to deliver LEAPS services. CHCF is one of over 200 organizational programs statewide that were approved to deliver services by OCFS through the new NYS Learning and Enrichment After-School Program Supports (LEAPS) but were *not* funded to





deliver those services. CHCF, who has been delivering these services for over 25 years in our communities, was forced to reduce its enrollment capacity by about 50% since the 2024-2025 school year. We know that the harm of this was felt far beyond CHCF and the students and families we serve, reaching across NYC school districts and communities. You can see the overall impact on New York City afterschool capacity through an analysis provided by United Neighborhood Houses, linked in the footnotes.¹

We appreciate the new administration's continued commitment to actualizing universal childcare throughout New York City – which does include care for children from 6 weeks to 13 years old. As the administration has been making exciting announcements regarding expanding 3K and developing and expanding 2K, it remains equally as important to continue moving NYC towards universal out-of-school-time care (before school, after school, and summer programming). By investing in CBO-led programs like afterschool, the city is investing not only in the long-term success of children directly served in programs but also in expanded access to resources and wrap around services for families, partnering schools, and communities.

It is worth noting that conversations around sustaining and building out the child care sector across the city certainly includes SACC programs and Day Care Centers who partner with the city to deliver current afterschool and summer programs; but also necessitate consideration and planning for engagement and equitable support of family child care programs who deliver out-of-school-time care as well. This modality of care offers mixed aged childcare for families who want to keep their children in the same care program for ease and comfort. Additionally, FCC programs often have long-standing relationships with families and the children, with strong bonds that function as an extended support system for families and their children, often from infant- and toddlerhood. As there has been an ongoing advocacy focus on the inclusion of the entire childcare sector in the city's expansion of early care and learning, so as not to destabilize and collapse the invaluable FCC sector, this is also a responsibility for DYCD, so that all NYC families are supported in receiving the care that best meets their needs and preferences.

CHCF additionally delivers college and career readiness programming to high school students in four schools in Manhattan and the Bronx, through our Opening Doors to the Future (ODF) program. Through a coordination of city funding and non-government funder support, we have built a comprehensive program that cultivates student interests, provides meaningful exposure to professional environments, and prepares young people for entry into the workforce. Our approach is designed to ensure that students leave high school ready for their next chapter, whether that's enrolling in college, serving in the armed forces, or stepping directly into career pathways. Participation in our ODF has led to a 100% promotion or graduation rate, with nearly all students successfully transitioning to postsecondary education, military service, or the professional workforce.

¹ Connolly, K. (Jan 2026). Change in state-funded afterschool slots (2026). United Neighborhood Houses. Retrieved from: [Change in state-funded afterschool slots \(2026\)](#)





We continue to uplift the proven impact of college and career readiness programs, with ODF as a clear example of the successes of these investments in youth. It is with this critical and impactful CHCF programming in mind that we stand in solidarity with all programs focused on building college and career readiness for high schoolers. Whether it is SYEP, WLG, or Learning to Work – these programs *all* demonstrably uplift student academic growth, open opportunities to connect with professional workplace experiences, and in many cases contribute to the financial stability of their families through paid internships. We urge city leaders to demonstrate their continued commitment to and prioritization of college and career readiness programming by continuing and baselining funding for the Learning to Work program in the FY27 budget (\$31M); along with restoring and baselining Student Success Centers (\$3.3M).²

Lastly, regarding youth development programming, CHCF has partnered with the city for the past 3 years to deliver Summer Rising programming at one of our partner schools in the Bronx. During the summer of 2025, we were able to provide safe care and academic enrichment to 165 students. While we continue to stress the importance of open communication and feedback between CBOs and city agencies, and look towards continued improvement in the program model, we support sustained and growing investments in summer programming for NYC students and families for FY26 and beyond, towards universal access to programs. We do, of course, recognize that New York City Public Schools must jointly invest in these programs, and maintain a partnership with both NYCPS and DYCD to deliver both academic and enrichment programming for students.

Early Care & Education Services

As one of four Child Care Resource & Referral agencies in the NYC CCR&R Consortium³, we are funded by New York State through Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds to support childcare providers with linguistically responsive technical assistance and intensive coaching and training. CHCF predominantly (but not exclusively) delivers supports to childcare providers in residential settings (Group Family and Family Day Care), overwhelmingly providers whose primary language is Spanish, across all five boroughs of New York City. In FY25 alone, we worked with over 1,200 programs and providers across NYC.

Additionally, through our work as a NYC CCR&R, CHCF supports families in accessing childcare that is responsive to their family's culture, language, schedule, and particular child needs. CHCF's multi-lingual staff support families as they navigate often complex bureaucratic systems to access free/affordable childcare. So far in the current fiscal year, we have referred nearly 900 families for childcare services; 88% of the families we have referred are below the poverty threshold, and 68% of the children referred are between the ages of 0-4 years. 100% percent of the children that we have referred for and have been

² Lavine, R. (Feb 2026) Coalition for Equitable Education Funding (CEEF) City Budget One-Pager. Retrieved from: [CEEF City Budget One-Pager](#)

³ [New York City Child Care Resource and Referral Consortium – New York City Child Care Resource and Referral Consortium](#)





served by ACS vouchers live below the poverty threshold; nearly half of the families referred for ACS vouchers (43%) are single-parent households.

CHCF continues to identify barriers faced by providers and families that are jeopardizing the stability of the childcare sector as well as family and community stability. There have been continued difficulties in accessing CCAP vouchers for families, with now well over 15,000 families on the waitlist (and growing) for access to affordability support. At a time when the childcare sector is dangerously close to collapse after a long history of being under-funded and under-supported, any investments made towards expanding family eligibility and access to subsidy *must* be followed with investments in the sector, ensuring equitable resourcing and sustainable funding to meet growing capacity needs.

Further impacts to childcare sustainability are under-enrollment which is impacted by inadequate voucher availability and centralized enrollment systems, which exclude community-based family supports, and system barriers for families to be approved for subsidy and be quickly connected to programs that would best meet their family and child's needs. Advocates statewide have called on the state OCFS to implement prospective payments based on enrollment. During the pandemic, NYC adopted pay by enrollment, which provided some semblance of stability at a time when enrollment and attendance were uncertain. Prospective payments based on enrollment would ensure that providers receive the necessary funds to deliver programs for the month, rather than being left to the uncertainty of the reimbursement process. While the regulatory adoption of both of these practices were included in New York State's CCDF plan, a shift in prioritization of implementing these best practices has shifted under the current federal administration, and OCFS has said that they will no longer be implementing these practices in the fall of 2026; and, although OCFS as reiterated its commitment to adopting these practices, they have not provided an updated timeline for implementation. CHCF supports a timely move towards a more stable funding model for childcare programs that serve children with subsidies, as one step towards stabilizing the sector.

An additional best practice that the NYC Administration has the ability to adopt now, is the use of presumptive eligibility. Although the waitlist has held enrollment in CCAP at a standstill, we continue to advocate for the appropriate allocation of state funding to not only maintain current enrollment, but clear the growing waitlist, and continue to enroll eligible families who are still in need and not on the waitlist. Our partners in the Empire State Campaign for Child Care estimate that there would need to be an additional \$1.2B on top of the increase included in the Governor's FY27 budget to do that. In the meantime, NYC can establish the infrastructure to more quickly deem families eligible and enroll their children in programs. Even when there isn't a waitlist, the time for ACS to determine eligibility can take well over 30 days, which is not conducive to supporting families trying to start a job now. During the 2023-2024 Legislative Session advocates were successful in getting a state law passed that allows local social service districts to use CCDBG funding to fund care while the family's ultimate eligibility is being determined.⁴ This is done through a determination of presumptive eligibility, based on evidence of a family meeting certain requirements that will result in their ultimate determination of eligibility, and has

⁴ NYS Assembly Bill A4099A (Clark), Senate Bill S4667 (Brouk):

<https://legislation.nysenate.gov/pdf/bills/2023/A4099A>





been successful – with minimal instances of families ultimately being deemed ineligible – in other regions, particularly Monroe County.⁵

The continued disruption in the flow and growth of enrollment of families into programs continues to be disproportionately felt in communities with higher rates of low-income families, as the families who enroll in those community programs are more likely to utilize vouchers to afford the high costs of care. While some programs are able to enroll private pay families to offset the inadequate funding of the vouchers, there are a significant number of programs – and disproportionately licensed programs in residential settings (FDC & GFDC) in low-income communities – who almost entirely serve families with vouchers. NYC cannot afford to see this level of disruption and harm on families, children, and the vulnerable yet essential childcare workforce.

CHCF calls on the NYC Administration and Council to go back to state leaders during final state budget negotiations to secure funding that will not only sustain current CCAP enrollment, but will reduce the waitlist and move in the direction of opening enrollment further to eligible families. City leaders must additionally continue to meet the MOE to ensure maximum receipt of state dollars, so that we can address the current child care crisis – even if the current system is broken – as we structure out a universal system to transition into. Our families, children, and the childcare workforce depend on city leaders to take the necessary, swift actions.

Of further note, while state and city leaders are making historical investments and commitments to establishing universal child care in NYC and NYS, we need *every leader* to openly own the long-standing, continued harms being done to the vital childcare workforce. The promise of universal childcare can *never be realized* if we don't take the necessary actions now to stem the collapse of the sector, particularly our most vulnerable FCC providers who are core to supporting the healthy, safe, culturally and linguistically responsive development of our children.

A recent report released by the New School – which CHCF was happy support the development of alongside our CCRC Consortium partners, FCC providers, and organizations that support the FCC sector – underscored the atrocious injustice that has and continues to be done to this predominantly women and BIPOC-led sector.⁶ The report, based on the comprehensive survey of 465 NYC FCC providers and subsequent interviews and focus groups, found that the FCC workforce is 94% female, 90% POC, 62% Hispanic, over 70% immigrant. When we discuss the need and desire for culturally and multi-lingually responsive care and early learning, this sector has already been delivering this programming yet are not recognized for the value they have in fostering multiculturalism in New York. These programs are an

⁵ Londono Gomez, Alejandra (Jun 2023). Presumptive Eligibility Process in Monroe County (NY). The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). Retrieved from: [2023.6.28_Presumptive-Eligibility-Policy-in-Monroe-County-NY.pdf](#)

⁶ Melodia, L. and Madge Paredes, A. (Nov 2025). Dignified Pay for Quality Care: What New York's Family Child Care Providers Need to Thrive. The New School Center for New York City Affairs. Retrieved from: <https://www.centernyc.org/reports-briefs/dignified-pay-for-quality-care-what-new-yorks-family-child-care-providers-need-to-thrive>





integral part of their community and often become an extended family for those that they serve. And yet, our city systems have continued to overwhelmingly fail to show up for this sector.

Not only is this modality of care a preferred choice by many parents, which must be maintained in order to honor a parent's right to select programs that will best meet their family and child's needs; this modality of care is an undisputable necessity in order to deliver on the promises being made to launch 2-K and in ultimately realizing Universal Child Care in NYC. And still, there continues to be general marginalization of this sector in systems design spaces, and we continue to see glaring inequities in existing partnerships with the city, with signals that this treatment will remain into new contracting and partnership, with continued devastation to the sector.

The New School report found that the current median take home pay – based on current enrollment trends – for Family Day Care providers (max. capacity enrollment up to 8 children) is just over \$19,000; and for Group Family Day Care (max. capacity up to 16), it is roughly \$15,400. When accounting for the additional hours worked by providers, beyond the compensated care and learning hours, the median hourly rate for FDC providers is \$4.81, and for GFDC providers is \$4.16. If programs were engaged in city systems equitably and supported to maintain “good enrollment” (considered 6 or more children in FDC, and 10 or more children in GFDC), the median take home pay rises to roughly \$58,600 and nearly \$48,000 respectively, with median hourly rates at \$15.52 for FDC and \$11.07 for GFDC.

We must additionally note that the current driver of these low wages is the grossly inadequate NYS Market Rate – which is determined by what providers charge families (what families can afford), rather than the true cost of delivering care and early learning programs. Providers who serve children with vouchers are forced to care the cost discrepancy on their backs; some, depending on the market they find themselves in, can somewhat offset the inadequate funding from the state by enrolling private pay families, however, we find that in our lowest income communities providers are more likely to predominantly care for children with vouchers, which holds them in a financially precarious state. Affiliated providers really don't have it any better, as the NYCPS rates for providers in network barely align with the state market rate, despite the fact that they are required to deliver additional levels of programming.

We call on city leaders to join advocates' fight for a statewide workforce compensation fund to stabilize the wages of this crucial workforce. The Empire State Campaign for Child Care is calling on a \$1.2B investment in the creation of a permanent workforce compensation fund, similar to Washington D.C.'s model, while work is done with the state to establish rates that reflect the true cost of care.⁷ We additionally call on all agencies and subsequent council oversight committees to work together to address workforce compensation at the city level, particularly, but not exclusively, through its contracting and funding practices.

It is also essential that NYC continue to support *all* NYC children in accessing early care and learning, regardless of their eligibility for federal funding-backed subsidies. We continue to celebrate Promise NYC and its success in supporting the care of over 600 children who are deemed ineligible for federally

⁷ Nikolopoulos, E., Doromal, J.B., Sandstrom, H., Greenberg, E., Mefferd, E., and González (Apr 2025). Wage Enhancements Benefit Child Care Staffing in DC: Workforce Perspectives from Fall 2024 Surveys. The Urban Institute. Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED673549.pdf>





funded childcare solely due to their immigration status. We join many in supporting Promise NYC being the continuation and growth of this program to meet the need for care, particularly for those families with children who are not yet being enveloped in universal systems. At a time when the nation climate continuously instills fear and isolation in immigrant communities, NYC must continue to step up and demonstrate its commitment to supporting immigrant New Yorkers.

Additional Early Literacy Work

Finally, CHCF continues to partner with 16 other community-based organizations under the City's First Readers Initiative. We have enthusiastically participated in this collaborative effort to provide New York City children and families from birth through 5 years with the pre-reading stimulation and support they need to be ready for school.

Reaching children during their most critical window of brain development isn't just smart—it's essential. By age 3, 80% of a child's brain is developed; by age 5, it's 90%. Early engagement supports healthy brain growth and helps identify children who may need extra support to meet developmental benchmarks and reach their full potential. Prevention today is far more effective than intervention tomorrow.

Since FY15, the New York City Council has recognized the power of early literacy through its unique initiative: City's First Readers (CFR). While the Council supports multiple initiatives focused on adult literacy, **CFR** is its **only** investment dedicated exclusively to early literacy—and it stands out not just for its focus, but for the deep collaboration it fosters.

Unlike other Council-funded efforts, which support organizations working independently on shared issues, CFR is a true partnership. Its 17 member organizations meet quarterly, collaborate through dedicated committees—on topics such as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion—and regularly co-promote or co-create programming. The Council's vision has enabled a model where each organization's expertise is not only valued but amplified through collective action.

As a proud CFR partner, we are deeply grateful for the Council's steadfast commitment to early literacy. We respectfully urge your continued support and consideration for an enhancement that will allow us to continue expanding our reach —so we can impact even more families and children in FY27.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony; and if there are any questions about our work or what is presented in our testimony, please reach out to Danielle Demeuse, Director of Policy, at: ddemeuse@chcfinc.org or 212-206-1090 ext. 359.





The Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF) is a non-profit organization with a 44-year history of combining education, capacity-building, and advocacy to strengthen the support system and continuum of learning for children and youth from birth through school-age.



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**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL TESTIMONY
COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH
MARCH 16, 2026**

Good afternoon Chair Stevens and members of the Children and Youth Committee. My name is Aastha Mehta, and I am testifying on behalf of Common Justice, a New York City organization that operates an alternative to incarceration program for serious violence and provides community-based services for young people impacted by violence and the criminal legal system.

Common Justice works in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Manhattan with young people facing significant prison sentences for violent crimes, as well as the survivors of those crimes. With the consent of the person harmed, these cases are diverted into a restorative justice process that centers survivor needs while requiring the responsible party to take meaningful accountability. Participants complete an intensive 12 to 15 month program that includes violence intervention, restorative justice dialogue, education and employment support, and ongoing supervision. Our outcomes remain strong: only 8% of responsible parties engaged in the program have been terminated for new crimes. A 2022 study by DCJS found that since solidifying our model in 2012, only one graduate had been convicted of a new violent felony.

Much of our work focuses on young people—particularly young men of color—from neighborhoods most impacted by violence and disinvestment. We work with young people ages 16 to 28 who have been involved in serious harm, as well as young survivors of violence who too often go unrecognized and underserved by traditional victim service systems. Nationally and in our city, young men of color are among those most likely to experience violent victimization, yet they are significantly underrepresented among those who receive victim services and support. Our work seeks to close that gap by providing trauma-informed services, healing spaces, and individualized support that allow young survivors to process harm, rebuild stability, and access the resources they need to move forward.

We also believe that young people most impacted by violence should have a meaningful role in shaping the policies and solutions that affect their lives. Through initiatives such as our civic engagement cohort, Common Justice engages young people, including survivors and program graduates, in opportunities to learn about policy advocacy, share their experiences, and participate in conversations about public safety and justice reform. Their leadership and perspective are critical to building systems that are responsive to the realities young people face.

Investing in young people means creating real opportunities for them to thrive in the communities they call home—ensuring access to housing stability, education support, mentorship, healing resources, and pathways to economic mobility in an increasingly unaffordable city.

If young people are truly our future, then we must invest in them now—by strengthening community-based services, expanding access to economic opportunity, and ensuring youth providers have the resources needed to support young people before they enter the legal system.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to New York City's young people.



NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL TESTIMONY COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

My name is Meaghan Hamilton and I am writing on behalf of Common Justice, Inc to urge the Committee on Children and Youth to invest in community-based programs that support youth most likely to experience violence and incarceration.

Common Justice works in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Manhattan with young people facing significant prison sentences for violent crimes, as well as the survivors of those crimes. With the consent of the person harmed, these cases are diverted into a restorative justice process that centers survivor needs while requiring the responsible party to take meaningful accountability. Participants complete an intensive 12 to 15 month program that includes violence intervention, restorative justice dialogue, education and employment support, and ongoing supervision. Our outcomes remain strong: only 8% of responsible parties engaged in the program have been terminated for new crimes. A 2022 study by DCJS found that since solidifying our model in 2012, only one graduate had been convicted of a new violent felony.

Much of our work focuses on young people—particularly young men of color—from neighborhoods most impacted by violence and disinvestment. We work with young people ages 16 to 28 who have been involved in serious harm, as well as young survivors of violence who too often go unrecognized and underserved by traditional victim service systems. Nationally and in our city, young men of color are among those most likely to experience violent victimization, yet they are significantly underrepresented among those who receive victim services and support. Our work seeks to close that gap by providing trauma-informed services, healing spaces, and individualized support that allow young survivors to process harm, rebuild stability, and access the resources they need to move forward.

We also believe that young people most impacted by violence should have a meaningful role in shaping the policies and solutions that affect their lives. Through initiatives such as our civic engagement cohort, Common Justice engages young people, including survivors and program graduates, in opportunities to learn about policy advocacy, share their experiences, and participate in conversations about public safety and justice reform. Their leadership and perspective are critical to building systems that are responsive to the realities young people face

In FY27 Common Justice is requesting funding to both sustain our direct service restorative justice and trauma support programming (2225839) as well as support the launch of our new civic engagement strategy (2226696). Common Justice’s direct service work benefits all New York residents by reducing cycles of violence and providing effective, non-prison-based responses to serious harm. By centering dignity, responsibility, and meaningful accountability, the program supports youth who have committed harm in changing behavior while offering harmed parties an empowering role in shaping the response to what they experienced. The program improves the mental health and wellbeing of crime survivors, provides more equitable access to services for young men of color and other underserved survivors, and averts the damaging individual and community-level impacts of incarceration. For our civic engagement strategy, Common Justice aims to equip young people in our communities most impacted by violence with the tools needed to understand local power, share their stories, grow as civic leaders, and change narratives on violence and safety.

In 2026 the leading cause of death for young people is gun violence, meaning that public safety is one of the most pressing issues effecting children and youth. But when we talk about public safety today, we must acknowledge that for Black and Latine communities—especially those in neighborhoods long impacted by systemic disinvestment—this term has often meant over-policing and mass criminalization. This cycle does not create safety. Instead, it destabilizes communities, disrupts lives, and perpetuates poverty, economic insecurity, and trauma - mothers lose sons, children lose parents, parents lose caregivers. However, longtime trends in neighborhood violent crime show, the safest communities are the most resourced communities. True public safety is not created through incarceration—it is built by investing in communities.

Investing in young people means creating real opportunities for them to thrive in the communities they call home—ensuring access to housing stability, education support, mentorship, healing resources, and pathways to economic mobility in an increasingly unaffordable city.

If young people are truly our future, then we must invest in them now—by strengthening community-based services, expanding access to economic opportunity, and ensuring youth providers have the resources needed to support young people before they enter the legal system.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to New York City’s young people.

Meaghan Hamilton
Senior Institutional Giving Manager
Common Justice, Inc.



Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies

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

**New York City Council
Committee on Children and Youth
Budget Hearing**

Monday, March 16, 2026

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony at the Committee on Children and Youth Budget Hearing. In this testimony, we present several budget priorities: 1) Workforce & Staffing Crisis; 2) Procurement Challenges; 3) Community-Based Prevention Services, 4) Liability Insurance for Child Welfare Foster Care Providers, and 5) Two Additional Child Welfare Program Concerns.

Workforce & Staffing Crisis

Child welfare agencies are currently facing a severe workforce and staffing crisis that is hindering their ability to deliver community-based services effectively. COFCCA's recent Workforce Compensation Report reveals staff turnover rates as high as 33% for caseworkers and 44% in prevention programs.¹ Human services organizations employ approximately 80,000 New Yorkers, of whom 75% are workers of color and 70% are women.² NYC-contracted agencies face significant challenges, including high staff turnover, achieving pay parity for an undercompensated workforce, and retaining qualified, experienced employees. Staffing is the lifeline of all child welfare programs and directly impacts the quality of services and the duration of foster care placements. Without the capacity to recruit, hire, retain, and compensate staff at market rates using government funding, agencies cannot maintain program utilization or meet service targets such as reunification, family preservation, adoption, and kinship placements. Child welfare staff and case managers are essential workers who form the safety net that protects children and provides services the City cannot deliver. They must be paid a living wage to continue driving and sustaining positive outcomes for children and families. Workforce priorities are:

- **COLA:** Continue funding the 3% Cost of Living Adjustment in the FY27 budget.
- **Pay Parity:** Current city contracts and budgets restrict providers to paying very low staff salaries. As a result, providers cannot compete with government and private employers, who offer caseworkers significantly higher starting salaries and better fringe benefits than nonprofits. Pass **Wage Equity Legislation (Int 0452-2026)**, which would align nonprofit and government human services job titles, and through that, raise salaries for nonprofit human services workers.

¹ [Workforce Compensation Report](#)

² [https://www.justpayny.org/facts-and-research#:~:text=The%20human%20services%20contract%20workforce.and%20women%20\(70%20percent\).](https://www.justpayny.org/facts-and-research#:~:text=The%20human%20services%20contract%20workforce.and%20women%20(70%20percent).)

- **Reducing Staff Turnover and Vacancy:** Agencies invest significant resources in onboarding, training, and developing new employees to prepare them to work with children and families. However, newly trained staff often leave after two years for higher-paying government positions. Nonprofit child welfare organizations effectively become training grounds, watching their investments walk out the door. The staff turnover and vacancy have significant impacts on children, youth, and families who have to come to trust another staff member and share their stories all over again. Providers need additional resources to recruit, hire, and retain a highly qualified workforce.
- **Career Development Support:** Child welfare staff need support to enhance career development opportunities. In addition to salary increases, they need assistance with scholarships, tuition aid, and loan forgiveness to pursue higher educational goals. Low salaries make it difficult for licensed mental health professionals to continue their education and repay student loans.

Procurement Challenges

We appreciate the recently announced \$5 billion investment in advance payments for nonprofit providers. This temporary relief alleviated the financial burden faced by nonprofits and enabled the sector to deliver critical resources to better serve our communities. Unfortunately, during the recoupment phase of these advances, providers were plunged back into deficit and experienced cash flow issues. Additionally, New York City is significantly behind in paying nonprofits on time for their services.³ COFCCA member agencies continue to face procurement and contract challenges that disrupt program operations. Their low cash reserves are further strained by delayed government payments for services. A 2025 study conducted by Pace University, titled “The Financial Health of Nonprofit Child Welfare Organizations in New York State,” highlighted the financial vulnerability of these agencies.⁴ The report reveals a concerning fragility in their financial health:

- 47% of the organizations surveyed had less than 30 days of cash reserves available for emergencies.
- 40% of organizations in New York City had 15 days or less of cash on hand, compared to 24% of organizations in the rest of the state.
- 47% of all child welfare nonprofits studied had less than one month of cash reserves.

According to the Human Services Council, 90% of nonprofits report delayed payments totaling \$365 million, making it nearly impossible to sustain fully operational programs.⁵ Some of these issues are severe enough to threaten program continuity and negatively impact services for children and families. Providers are often forced to obtain and use lines of credit to maintain operations, incurring interest expenses without a means to recover these costs, effectively subsidizing city contracts. Among these procurement challenges are underfunded contracts, which become increasingly unmanageable due to rising costs over the contract's duration.

³ https://humanservicescouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/111924_HSC-City-Procurement-Survey-Results.pdf.

⁴ A 2025 national report, “[Insuring Care: How Liability Insurance Access Threatens Community Services for Children](#)”

⁵ https://humanservicescouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/111924_HSC-City-Procurement-Survey-Results.pdf

The financial solvency of nonprofits is further jeopardized by federal cuts to programs. Historically, the federal government has been a vital fiscal partner to New York City nonprofits, providing support both through direct federal contracts and City and State pass-through funding streams. In many cases, nonprofits were able to promptly access payments for federally contracted services without delay. Timely federal payments have been crucial in helping nonprofits sustain their program operations during periods when New York City was significantly behind in compensating agencies for their services. Federal cuts to any of the funding streams New Yorkers rely on will create substantial gaps in the City's budget and threaten to significantly disrupt the delivery of services by contracted providers.

Delayed and Delinquent Payments:

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

Community-Based Prevention Challenges

The successful reduction in foster care placements in New York City would not be possible without prevention services. These programs enable more children to remain safely in their homes, avoiding foster care placement. NYC's prevention programs include a wide range of evidence-based and primary prevention service models. Since 2013, prevention service interventions have been shown to significantly improve child safety outcomes by reducing repeat maltreatment cases and the likelihood of future foster care placements. Families at the highest risk of new abuse and neglect reports who participated in prevention services are significantly less likely to experience a new indicated abuse report and are two to four times less likely to have a child placed in foster care compared to families that did not participate in such services. In 2025, an ACS prevention family survey reported positive experiences and high satisfaction with prevention services ⁶.

Primary Prevention: ACS continues to divert youth from foster care and achieve substantial savings through the expansion of prevention services. Some of these savings have been reinvested into communities via community-based primary prevention programs, including an increase in the number of Family Enrichment Centers (FECs) from three to thirty. Community-based FECs allow families in need of assistance to voluntarily walk in for support. Primary prevention programs connect families to community-based supports and assistance through a network of peer and professional resources, often serving as a critical intervention for families at risk of child welfare involvement due to abuse, neglect, or maltreatment. These programs aim to provide holistic support accessible to everyone in a given community, providing information, resources, education, and other supports. ⁷

⁶ <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/PressReleases/2025/family-experience-survey-2024.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/fec.page>.

During this period, as families and nonprofit agencies face increasing federal funding cuts, there is a significant need for resources and assistance. Prevention services programs are addressing these needs.

Factors Impacting Prevention Programs: Contracted prevention service agencies are nearly five years into a nine-year prevention contract, yet they do not see a clear path to continued efficient and effective service delivery due to current fiscal deficits, which are expected to become increasingly unmanageable over the remainder of the contract. Both large and small agencies face the same fixed costs and need to maintain staffing levels, serve families, and sustain slot utilization. Without an increase in baseline salaries for BA-level staff and the ability to address compression issues, prevention programs will continue to struggle with hiring staff and maintaining adequate capacity to serve families.

The ACS prevention budgets, along with the associated budget approval, invoicing, and modification processes, do not enable agencies to respond effectively to the significant changes in the labor market over the past few years. Market-rate salaries for human services professionals have been increasing, and providers are in direct competition not only with public sector employers such as ACS and DOE but also with private sector employers offering greater flexibility in remote work, telehealth, and scheduling. The salaries providers offer are too low to consistently fill positions, resulting in vacancies and unspent funds. Although it may seem counterintuitive to claim that the contracts are underfunded when money remains unspent, the reality is that providers are forced to offer below-market salaries, creating this illusion. If providers could hire at more competitive salaries, they would be better able to retain staff, reduce vacancies, and serve more families effectively.

We urge the Council to continue fully funding prevention programs, as they address the intensive needs of families. Additionally, we encourage expanding access to Family Enrichment Centers (FECs) across the five boroughs to better respond to these critical family needs.

Obtaining and Affording Liability Insurance for Foster Care Programs

Nonprofit child welfare organizations must be able to access, obtain, and afford liability insurance to provide foster care services as a requirement of their contracts with NYC. New York City's approximately 6500 children and youth in foster care are all in the care of voluntary foster care agencies, as the City does not operate its own foster care placements. These nonprofit agencies that care for children and youth who have experienced abuse, neglect, or family disruption have been experiencing a tightening insurance market over the past several years. A 2025 national report, [“Insuring Care: How Liability Insurance Access Threatens Community Services for Children”](https://togetherthevoice.org/insuringcare/), revealed that the child welfare liability insurance crisis is widespread and jeopardizes the public-private partnership and infrastructure of community-based services for children, youth, and families.⁸ If nonprofit providers become uninsured and can no longer deliver foster care services, the responsibility for providing these services will shift to the city. This issue is becoming increasingly urgent, as there are already very few insurance providers in this sector. If left unaddressed, this problem may prevent voluntary foster care agencies in New York from legally serving children in foster placement if they cannot secure or afford adequate liability insurance.

⁸ <https://togetherthevoice.org/insuringcare/>

It is crucial that the Council and the Mayoral Administration are informed about the impact and potential costs to the City if foster care providers are no longer able to deliver foster care services due to being unable to access and/or to afford required liability insurance coverage. The City would face exorbitant expenses if it were compelled to assume responsibility for foster care programs. We want to alert the Council to a bill recently introduced in the New York State Legislature—S.9113/A.9646—sponsored by Senator Bailey and Assembly Member Hevesi. This bill supports foster care agencies, ensuring continuity of care for children and families across the state by:

- Establishing assigned risk plans in state statutes to ensure that foster care agencies have access to mandated insurance coverage by requiring insurance companies offering general liability insurance in New York to provide coverage to a portion of foster care providers;
- Providing \$20 million in direct state support to address significant increases in liability insurance costs as toward longer-term solutions. This funding will offer immediate assistance to providers demonstrating financial hardship, helping to cover the increased premiums that foster care agencies face for their mandated liability insurance coverage; and
- Providing for the timely updating of state-set foster care rates (called Maximum State Aid Rates, or MSAR): Foster care agency insurance costs have increased by 28% in the past year alone. However, state-set foster care rates are based on data from two years prior, which do not reflect these recent cost increases experienced by providers. Additionally, many agencies are facing cost growth that significantly exceeds the capped allowances for these expenses. As a result, the state-set rates fail to keep pace with actual costs year after year. This bill would require modifications to the state-set foster care rate calculation to account for these rapidly rising liability insurance costs.

COFCCA supports this bill and encourages the Council and the City to collaborate with state legislators to advance its passage, aiming to prevent the collapse of the NYC-contracted foster care system. A summary of COFCCA’s advocacy for liability insurance protection for foster care providers is outlined in a commentary published in a [Times Union article](#).⁹

Additional Child Welfare Program Concerns

Child welfare providers are required by contracts to offer special services to children, including transportation to school for those without DOE bus transportation. They must also ensure that youth in the juvenile justice system have adequate access to community-based aftercare services. Providers often struggle to meet their contractual obligations when they are not reimbursed by the DOE and are unable to secure sufficient vocational training, educational programs, and other developmental supports.

School Transportation: Agencies are required to secure and pay for private transportation services for children who do not have access to school bus service. The Administration for Children's Services (ACS) has an agreement with the Department of Education (DOE) to reimburse agencies for all private transportation expenses. However, the DOE has been delinquent in making these reimbursements, and agencies continue to face extended periods of nonpayment.

⁹ <https://www.timesunion.com/opinion/article/new-hurdle-child-welfare-agencies-finding-21362954.php>

Aftercare Services for Youth: Juvenile justice programs are required to connect young people in foster care with community-based aftercare services, including counseling, vocational training, GED preparation, mental health support, employment assistance, and other resources tailored to their specific needs. This presents a significant challenge for providers, as such services are often scarce or nonexistent in some communities. Finding resources in community-based settings is frequently difficult, yet these services are essential in the continuum of care to support vulnerable youth transitioning out of care.

Recommendations

Workforce

- **COLA:** Continue funding the 3% Cost of Living Adjustment in the FY27 budget.
- Pass **Wage Equity Legislation (Int 0452-2026)**, which would align nonprofit and government human services job titles, and through that, raise salaries for nonprofit human services workers.
- Invest in the child welfare workforce by elevating the importance of staff and recognizing their value through salary increases, scholarships, and tuition assistance. These investments will help agencies maintain a highly trained and credentialed child welfare workforce.

Procurement and Contracts

- Reform New York City's procurement system by addressing the critical issue affecting contracted service providers: delayed and overdue payments for services already rendered.
- Urge the city to expedite all overdue contract payments to human services providers.
- Engage nonprofit leaders to prepare for potential reductions in federal funding to help minimize the financial impact on nonprofit budgets and essential social services for children, families, and communities in New York City.

Prevention Services

- Act to ensure the sustainability of the existing robust prevention services system as a safe and effective intervention to support families and to avoid family separation.
- Expand community-based Family Enrichment Centers, primary prevention programs, throughout the city to ensure that there is at least one program in every community district.

Liability Insurance for Foster Care Providers

- Support the passage of a bill recently introduced in the New York State Legislature—S.9113/A.9646—sponsored by Senator Bailey and Assembly Member Hevesi. Support the operations of nonprofit providers by ensuring the availability, accessibility, and affordability of required liability insurance for child welfare foster care providers.

Additional Child Welfare Concerns

- Invest in more community-based programs to ensure that youth have access to essential employment, vocational, and developmental resources.

- Urge the DOE to honor its commitment to provide timely transportation for students in foster care and to reimburse agencies promptly for the costs of student transportation.

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

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**Testimony of the Day Care Council of New York
Before the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth
Honorable Althea Stevens, Chair
At the FY 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing**

**Prepared by Gregory Brender, Chief Policy Officer,
and Shelby Lohr, Senior Policy Analyst**

March 16, 2026

Thank you, Chair Stevens and members of the Committee on Children and Youth, for the opportunity to testify. The City Council has long been a leader in early childhood education. We share your excitement about the historic expansions in early care and education now being implemented. We count on you and the Mamdani administration to ensure that these expansions meet the needs of all families, support the early childhood education workforce, and stabilize child care provider organizations.

The Day Care Council of New York (DCCNY) is the membership organization of early care and education providers across New York City. DCCNY envisions a future in which all children have access to high-quality early childhood education and providers and their workforce have the tools and resources needed to deliver it.

DCCNY supports its members and the broader early childhood field through policy research and advocacy, labor relations and mediation, workforce training and professional development, and referral services for families seeking child care. Our member organizations operate more than 200 sites across all five boroughs.

Most DCCNY member organizations contract with the New York City Public Schools, while others rely on child care vouchers issued by ACS and HRA, federally funded Head Start contracts, or private funding. Collectively, DCCNY member organizations employ over 4,000 New Yorkers – predominantly Black and Brown women - and serve children and families citywide.

Child Care Assistance Program

Over 10,000 families remain on waitlists for child care vouchers through the Administration for Children's Services. While families on public assistance are still guaranteed vouchers, working families with low incomes are not, leaving struggling families unable to afford child care.

In FY 2026, the City invested \$228 million, which allowed the City to draw down an additional \$350 million in State funding to support Child Care Assistance in New York City. We are thrilled that Governor Hochul has committed \$1.2 billion in new funding statewide to support the Child Care Assistance Program in her Executive Budget Proposal.

However, at the March 2nd hearing of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education, the administration reported that the Governor's investment will allow ACS to continue offering vouchers to families currently receiving care but will not clear the voucher waitlist.

DCCNY urges the City to take the following actions to address the waitlist:

- Provide additional funding to support families on the voucher waiting list.
- Connect families on the voucher waitlist with opportunities to access Extended Day/ Extended Year programs in DOE-contracted community-based organizations.

Promise NYC

Promise NYC funds child care for families who otherwise would have been denied. NYC's Administration for Children's Services partners with five community-based organizations to ensure that families can access this funding.

Promise NYC is not just an important investment, but also a statement of the City's values, showing a commitment to ending discrimination and expanding access to education. It remains a necessary program offering an option for full-year service and extended and non-traditional hours for families who are excluded from Extended Day/ Extended Year programs in community-based organizations and ACS child care vouchers.

DCCNY urges New York City to invest \$50 million to renew and enhance Promise NYC.

Support the Early Childhood Education Workforce

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

This means that people who have the skills, knowledge and education to be great early childhood educators, leaders, and support staff often cannot and do not stay in their roles because they cannot sustain their lives with lower salaries.

In order to address these inequities and ensure that child care provider organizations can attract and retain a quality workforce, DCCNY offers the following recommendations:

Establish consistent expectations for pay based on experience: Establish a defined career ladder for early educators and an articulation of appropriate compensation at each rung of that career ladder.

Set a wage floor: The City can define a minimum wage for child care workers that recognizes their labor and the skill required. This would, in particular, benefit teaching aides and staff in other support roles whose salaries are currently pegged to the citywide minimum wage.

Use contracts to drive toward parity across settings: The City can work with labor and management to address inequities in the current collective bargaining agreements. Notably, future contracts should include longevity increases comparable to what UFT members earn, and provisions to address the longer day and year that many child care center teachers work. Contracts should include cost escalators so that salaries can keep up with inflation and COLAs.

Establish a wage fund: As part of the Empire State Campaign for Child Care, DCCNY is advocating for a dedicated fund to increase child care worker compensation at the State level. A fund like this on the City level could close the gap between what families are able to afford to pay for care and what programs need to appropriately compensate their workforce.

Provide universal health insurance coverage for child care workers: The City could expand health care coverage by providing access to free or very low-cost insurance plans inclusive of the center-based and home-based workforce. In the past, the city had a health insurance program that CBOs could opt into. The City should revisit this model and determine how it could be made more effective.

Expand access to pension plans: A majority of early childhood educators do not have access to employer- or union-supported retirement plans and are unable to save for retirement themselves. There are some existing publicly-supported retirement systems, including the Cultural Institutions Retirement System (CIRS), which already includes some child care workers. The City could work with CIRS to expand eligibility criteria, allowing more private child care programs to opt in for their employees.

Provide housing support: City workers are already eligible for priority in housing lotteries, including public school teachers. However, this priority does not currently include child care workers. The City could create specific priorities within the Department of Housing Preservation and Development's affordable housing lotteries to ensure that child care workers have the same priority as other categories of essential workers.

Create career exposure and dual enrollment training programs for high school students: As NYCPS continues to expand opportunities for workforce development and career exploration in high school, there are opportunities to expose high school students to child care work and give them opportunities to work in early childhood programs. Programs of this type have the dual benefit of attracting new people into the child care workforce, while also filling immediate gaps in staffing.

Launch a city-funded apprenticeship program: New York City could develop a City-funded apprenticeship program that matches current and aspiring caregivers with existing home-based or center-based programs to give them paid, on-the-job learning opportunities while simultaneously matching them to low-cost or tuition-free credential programs. New York already has [a robust infrastructure in place](#) to support apprenticeships across sectors. Given the fragmentation in child care and the small scale of most child care programs, an apprenticeship program would likely have to be driven at the sector level by the City or an intermediary, like DCCNY, rather than by individual child care programs.

DCCNY also urges New York City to work with New York State to:

Speed up the background check process for new staff: The City must continue to focus on expediting the background check process so that teachers can begin working in programs faster. The City should also explore making background checks portable. Currently, educators must go through the background check process again if they start at a new program, which may inhibit some educators from staying in the field. There is some precedent for expanding portability; currently, staff can work at different sites operated by the same organization. Moving to full portability would require state action.

Experiment with new credentialing models: Across the country, including [elsewhere in New York](#), community colleges are introducing new stackable [micro-credentials](#) to support current or aspiring early childhood educators who are looking to enhance their qualifications, but may not have the time, budget, or interest to work toward a full degree. With buy-in from the city that micro-credentials could be tied to pay increases for early childhood educators, community colleges and child care programs could work together to develop coursework that addresses specific learning gaps they are seeing in the workforce. For child care workers, this could be a mechanism to build particular skills and be compensated for it.

Create substitute teacher pools: When a child care worker is absent, programs typically must scramble to maintain coverage. Child care centers that contract with the city can access NYC Public Schools substitute teachers. However, they are required to pay those substitutes the UFT-negotiated rate of about \$50 an hour, which is more than centers can afford - and highly problematic internally when their own substitute teachers and support staff earn minimum wage (or \$18 per hour, if subject to DC- 37's CBA). New York City could launch its own substitute pool, in collaboration with the state or on its own.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please feel free to contact Gregory Brender, gbrender@dccnyinc.org or Shelby Lohr slohr@dccnyinc.org with any questions.

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL TESTIMONY
COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH
MARCH 16, 2026**

To: The Honorable Althea Stevens, Chair, Committee on Children and Youth

From: Kalilah Moon, Executive Director, Drive Change
Board Member, NYC Employment and Training Coalition

Date: March 16, 2026

Good afternoon Chair Stevens and members of the Children and Youth Committee. Today I testify on behalf of Drive Change. Drive Change builds economic mobility for justice-involved young adults in NYC through our culinary arts training program. Alumni receive coaching and upskilling, while our employer network, social enterprise, and youth-led community food programs create sustainable jobs and leadership pathways. Our mission is to support justice-involved young people ages 18-25 by providing culinary and hospitality training, social support, and pathways to advance their economic mobility and overall wellbeing.

If we truly believe that young people are our future, then our budget must reflect that belief. Investing in young people means more than responding when something goes wrong—it means creating real opportunities for them to thrive in the communities they call home. It means ensuring that the basic needs many of our young people struggle to meet—housing stability, education support, mentorship, and access to services. And it means building clear pathways to economic mobility for youth in a city that has become unimaginably unaffordable.

Yet, too often in our city, young people only gain access to the services and supports they need only *after* they have already been arrested or are in crisis. Instead of building systems that proactively meet young people where they are, we wait until they have contact with the legal system before mobilizing resources. At that point, service organizations are asked to do the incredibly difficult work of wrapping a young person in supports while also confronting the deeper challenges that may have led to system involvement in the first place—poverty, trauma, unmet educational needs, housing instability, and lack of economic opportunity.

Across New York City, the organizations entrusted with serving young people are asked to meet increasingly complex needs while operating with exceptionally limited resources. City contracts for youth services remain significantly underfunded compared to adult service contracts—contracts that are themselves insufficient—creating persistent challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff and maintaining the continuity of care that young people need to thrive. These constraints are particularly acute as we better understand the profound impacts of mental health challenges and trauma among youth; hiring and retaining clinical professionals capable of responding to these needs requires meaningful and sustained investment.

One of the most effective models for supporting system-impacted youth is to employ credible messengers—individuals with lived experience who can build essential trust and connection with young people—yet current funding structures rarely support them in long-term, sustainable career pathways. As a result, the very people we recognize as indispensable to this work are often unable to remain in it. Together, these structural barriers undermine providers’ ability to deliver consistent, high-quality services and highlight the urgent need for funding models that reflect the true scope and importance of supporting New York City’s young people.

Young people need access to real economic mobility. Paid work experience, connections to continuing education, and pathways into careers are not peripheral supports—they are core prevention strategies. When young people can see a future for themselves, when they can earn income, build skills, and connect to opportunity, they are far less likely to become involved in the justice system in the first place. These investments should be treated as central to youth justice policy, not as an add-on. If we want different outcomes for young people, we must treat youth services as the critical public safety investment they are.

Our Drive Change Fellowship is a paid, 12-week workforce development program serving justice-involved young people ages 18–25. Fellows participate in intensive culinary and hospitality training alongside leadership development, financial literacy, and healing-centered support. The Fellowship is structured around a three-phase journey—**Head, Heart, and Hands**—designed to align skill-building with emotional regulation, accountability, and real-world experience.

Fellows earn wages throughout the program, obtain industry-recognized credentials, and complete supervised work “trails” at partner restaurant sites. Wraparound support includes case management, mental health–informed practices, and individualized transition planning to support job placement and retention.

These are the kinds of evidence-based investments we should be scaling up.

This is why organizations serving justice-involved young people worked together to create the [Landscape of Youth Services for Young People with Juvenile/Criminal Legal Systems Involvement](#), a budget document that helps provide context and recommendations for how scaling should be approached. To scale requires us to invest in the strategies that have proven effective: prevention, credible messaging, and intensive community-based supports. We believe these investments must include:

- Investments in prevention programs that should include peer learning and supports, community in-reach through credible messengers, afterschool programs and drop-in centers, educational supports and more, including but not limited to the proposed increase in COMPASS to \$1.47 billion to meet the needs of the growing census in detention and \$5 million to reignite the NextSTEPS program;
- New investments in the education and programming needs of our young people in detention, inclusive of emerging adults who are now at Rikers.
- Expanded investments in reentry and aftercare for youth and emerging adults, including additional funding to the Community Justice Reentry Network (\$40 million);
- Expanded family court alternative to detention programs to allow young people and emerging adults to be diverted for more serious felonies, including but not limited to gun charges, in every borough (\$30 million);
- Development and promotion of new programs that connect youth to year-round employment opportunities with a meaningful wage, including including \$8,114,227 for the Anti-Gun Violence Employment Program, an increase of \$3.1 million; and,
- Doubled funding (to \$6.89 million) for Council’s Court-Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative, bringing that initiative to new neighborhoods across the City and eliminating waitlists.

- Drive Change respectfully requests investment to expand our workforce development model, including our nonprofit-led social enterprise, which provides paid, structured employment for justice-involved young adults. Additional funding would allow us to increase the number of young people served, strengthen retention supports, and scale transitional employment opportunities that bridge training and long-term careers. Investing in models that integrate workforce development with real work experience is critical to achieving sustained outcomes for young people across New York City.

If young people are truly our future, then we must invest in them now—by strengthening community-based services, ensuring youth providers are adequately resourced, expanding access to economic opportunity, and building a coordinated system that meets young people where they are.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to New York City's young people.

Respectfully,
Kalilah Moon
Executive Director, Drive Change
kalilah@drivechangenyc.org
347-696-0943



Long Testimony (approx 4 minutes)

Thank you, Speaker Menin, Chair Stevens, and to the members of the Committee on Children and Youth, for the opportunity to testify at today's Preliminary FY27 Budget hearing. My name is Alex Griffith, Senior Director of Programs and Court Partnerships at exalt.

exalt serves court-involved youth ages 15 to 19, many of whom are chronically disengaged from their schools, overaged and under-credited, and reading at a 4th grade level. Our powerful model—comprised of tangible skill development classes, paid internships, and a robust alumni network—equips our youth with the tools and experience necessary to not only avoid recidivating, but truly experience the best that life has to offer. Because that is what our young people deserve.

Utilizing this cross-sector approach, exalt has achieved remarkable results with young people that, in many ways, society at large has not. We are proud to say that 95% of our alumni do not recidivate, 98% are on track to graduate by age 20, 100% are more employable and ready for the world of work, and 75% of the young people that come to us with open court cases have their sentences reduced or dismissed

These outcomes represent a significant savings to our City and State, as the estimated cost per year to incarcerate a young person ranges from \$266,000 to as high as \$892,000. exalt's model is conservatively 18 to as much as 60 times less expensive than incarceration, providing government billions in savings while producing far better outcomes for young people.

exalt is also a proud member of the Alternative to Incarceration (ATI) Coalition and Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice's ATI portfolio. Alongside our partners across the city, we support increased investment in frontline organizations—particularly ATI programs—that provide proven, community-based alternatives to detention and incarceration for young people involved in the justice system. This year, we are asking the Administration for the restoration and expansion of funding for ATIs and Reentry services at MOCJ, a \$24.6 million increase from what is proposed in the preliminary budget. From the NYC Council, the NYC ATI and Reentry Coalition is requesting an additional \$2.4 million increase in the Alternatives to Incarceration and Reentry Programs initiative across our 12 organizations.



As impactful as the numbers are, there is nothing as powerful as hearing from the participants themselves. Christina, one of our alumni, said:

“I became a participant at exalt during the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when I was very disconnected from everyone. Exalt was incredibly instrumental in helping me to develop my networking and social skills for the professional world. Exalt was where I began to plan for my future by going to college to start a career within the criminal justice field. This was something I had never thought about before, or even thought was possible, prior to my time at exalt.”

Currently, exalt is in the midst of a three-year campaign focused on increasing capacity, strengthening our alumni program, and establishing the exalt Institute. Historically, we have relied heavily on the philanthropic sector, with over 90% of our organizational budget coming from foundations. Now more than ever, partnership with government is of the utmost importance as we look to deepen our proven work, reach more young people, and help transform the landscape of juvenile justice here in New York City.

In this context, discretionary funding remains especially important. exalt’s model is proven and has been academically studied, but the structure of our programming does not always align neatly with traditional government contracting mechanisms. Flexible discretionary funding allows organizations like exalt to continue delivering evidence-based programming while remaining responsive to the complex needs of justice-impacted youth.

Finally, exalt is always happy to serve as a resource to the Council and to City agencies. We are eager to share best practices from our work with justice-impacted youth and to support the development of strong public–private partnerships that can expand opportunity for young people across New York City.

Our city’s youth need you to prioritize funding organizations like exalt and other frontline ATI providers whose proven models yield real results and truly transform the lives of our young people. Thank you for your leadership and dedication to New York City’s youth.



Condensed Testimony (approx 2.5 minutes)

Thank you, Speaker Menin, Chair Stevens, and members of the Committee on Children and Youth, for the opportunity to testify at today's Preliminary FY27 Budget hearing. My name is Alex Griffith, Senior Director of Programs and Court Partnerships at **exalt**.

exalt serves justice-impacted youth ages 15 to 19, many of whom are chronically disengaged from school, overage and under-credited, and reading at a fourth-grade level. Our model—combining skill development classes, paid internships, and a robust alumni network—equips young people with the tools and experience necessary to avoid recidivating and build meaningful futures.

Through this cross-sector approach, **exalt** has achieved strong outcomes with youth who often face significant barriers. Seventy-five percent of participants who come to us with open court cases have their sentences reduced or dismissed. Ninety-eight percent are on track to graduate by age 20, and even two years after completing our program, 95% do not recidivate.

These outcomes also represent substantial savings for our City and State. The estimated annual cost to incarcerate a young person ranges from \$266,000 to as high as \$892,000. By contrast, **exalt's** model is between 18 and 60 times less expensive while producing far better outcomes for young people.

exalt is a proud member of the Alternative to Incarceration (ATI) Coalition and the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice ATI portfolio. Alongside partners across the city, we advocate for increased investment in frontline ATI programs that provide proven, community-based alternatives to detention and incarceration for justice-involved youth. This year, we are urging the Administration to restore and expand MOCJ funding for ATI and Reentry services by \$24.6 million above the preliminary budget. The NYC ATI and Reentry Coalition is also requesting an additional \$2.4 million from the City Council to support ATI and Reentry initiatives across our 12 organizations.

Currently, **exalt** is undertaking a three-year campaign to increase capacity, strengthen our alumni program, and establish the **exalt** Institute. Historically, more than 90% of our



funding has come from philanthropy. As we look to expand our impact, partnership with government is more important than ever.

Discretionary funding is particularly important for **exalt**. While our model is proven and has been academically studied, the structure of our programming does not always align neatly with traditional government contracting mechanisms. Flexible funding allows organizations like ours to continue delivering evidence-based programming while remaining responsive to the complex needs of justice-impacted youth.

Finally, **exalt** is always happy to serve as a resource to the Council and City agencies. We welcome opportunities to share best practices and support the development of strong public-private partnerships that expand opportunity for young people across New York City.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to the young people of our city.



SASKIA TRAILL
PRESIDENT & CEO EXPANDED SCHOOLS
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NYC COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH
FY 2027 EXECUTIVE BUDGET HEARING: MARCH 16, 2026

My name is Saskia Trill, and I am the President/CEO of ExpandedED Schools. Thank you to Speaker Menin, Chair Stevens, Chair Lee, and the Committee on Finance, as well as the Committee on Children and Youth, for the opportunity to testify here today. It is a pleasure to work collaboratively with all of you to create effective strategies to increase access, equity, and quality in expanded learning opportunities for young people across New York City. ExpandedED Schools is dedicated to ensuring that all young people in New York City have access to enriching programs that affirm their identities, teach them valuable skills, and spark new possibilities in and out of the school day.

We are a youth-serving intermediary that supports direct service community-based organizations (CBO's) across the five boroughs to cultivate positive relationships with school leaders and deliver high-quality programs to students and families. For the past 28 years, ExpandedED has worked to build, refine, and sustain New York City's foundational system of school-community partnership for afterschool programming. We know that afterschool is a place where our city's youth and families turn to for fundamental supports beyond childcare: a space for youth to deepen their skills and interests through extra learning time, connect to their peers and caring adults, and explore new opportunities and innovative programming none of which could be possible without the foundation of a strong afterschool system.

For more than 20 years, we have invested City Council funds in CBOs to augment direct city contracts and provide necessary afterschool services throughout the five boroughs. We also provide robust professional development to afterschool staff, support quality afterschool by visiting programs and providing regular support to afterschool site directors, and convene site directors to learn from one another's practice.

In FY25, a citywide discretionary award from the City Council enabled ExpandedED to fund programs in 39 Council Districts. These funds directly supported approximately 5,851 students in 73 afterschool programs and 731 educators in 32 professional development events with staff from 96 CBOs. Last year, we served more than 88 community partners and 290 schools throughout all five boroughs. And since our inception, we have served more than 1.6 million public school students. The vast majority of our students identify as young people of color (85%), and most live in low-income communities (75%).

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

This year is a pivotal one for the City's afterschool infrastructure, and we are excited about the new contracts through the City's COMPASS program. After many years of extending contracts, these contracts will breathe new life into our vital system and bring in newer, truly



community-based providers to take the helm and offer dynamic, exciting programming to our children throughout the city.

Getting so many new partners up and running smoothly will not be easy, and we are in an all-hands-on-deck moment as a field. ExpandedED is eager to support this growing ecosystem. We fully support additional support for the field through DYCD capacity-building efforts and coordination with other public and privately funded efforts. We stand ready to support the Council, DYCD, and the hundreds of providers offering afterschool activities for our young people.

We are grateful and proud of what we have been able to do in partnership with the council through our **\$4.0M Afterschool Enrichment Citywide Initiative Award in FY26**. Programs mostly leverage the subgrants we distribute to fill gaps that either enable them to fortify their staffing, serve more students, or boost program quality. At a small number of programs, the subgrant is their primary public funding stream. To scale our work and to meet this pivotal moment, we request additional funding.

Our FY27 request of \$6.0M would enable ExpandedED to support community organizations across the five boroughs in offering afterschool slots for K-12 where none exist and to improve quality. Additional Afterschool Enrichment Initiative funds would enable us to support more young people, more programs, and more districts during this period of extraordinary need for afterschool and positive youth development throughout New York City. It would also give us greater capacity to serve communities where there are continued gaps. We welcome a partnership with each council member to identify school partners in need of our support because you know your constituency and districts best.

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



Testimony of the Article 10 Family Defense Organizations:

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

Presented Before

The New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth

Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 16, 2026

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

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

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

³ *Id.*

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

The primary goal of our work is to provide high quality legal representation to parents in high-stakes investigation and family court cases and ameliorate the underlying systemic barriers that drive families into this system, such as lack of access to quality health and mental health treatment, material supports and appropriate education and services for children with disabilities. We also aim to reduce the harm of the consequences of system involvement, such as criminal charges, housing and income loss, education issues and inability to adjust immigration status. Collectively we represent thousands of parents each year. Since 2007 when New York City first contracted with family defense organizations to represent parents, we have represented tens of thousands of parents in family court, touching the lives of well over 100,000 children, the vast majority of whom are Black and Brown and live in the most marginalized, low-income communities in New York City.

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

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

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

We ask the City Council to continue supporting the Right to Family Advocacy Project. Given that we have not had an increase in funding for this work in five years and the demand for services has increased, **we are asking for a very modest increase in the overall funding for our four offices from \$2.6 million to \$3.4 million to increase capacity based on need and address rising costs.**

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

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

Over the last almost 19 years, our offices have honed family defense practices that serve as a state and national model, recognized as the most effective approach to advocacy for parents in family regulation cases.⁴ The Commission on Parental Representation, established by Chief Judge DiFiore to examine the state of representation for indigent parents in New York State, issued an interim report in February 2019 following extensive hearings. It recommended the adoption of New York City's parent representation model in family regulation cases statewide. The Commission concluded that:

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

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

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

⁵ *Interim Report to Chief Judge DiFiore* at 26.

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

exacerbated by the stress of poverty, or confront other challenges, such as cognitive disabilities. A significant portion of our clients have experienced periods in the foster system during their childhood or are young parents currently navigating the foster system.

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

The family policing system¹¹ disproportionately punishes, controls, surveils, and forcibly separates low-income Black and Brown families. Just as our modern police systems descend from slave patrols, the family policing system is deeply rooted in our country's history of separating Indigenous, Black, and low-income children from their families.

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

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

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

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

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

¹¹ [Abolishing Policing Also Means Abolishing Family Regulation](#)

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

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

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

All these processes create a dynamic that entangles low-income Black and Brown families into a system that, more often than not, tears them apart. For the people who find themselves in these

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

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

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

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

horrifying circumstances, their attorney and social worker team is the lifeline to bring their children home, which is why our services are critical and must be properly resourced and supported by the city.

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

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

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

Our offices develop close relationships with community-based programs serving New York’s immigrant communities, ensuring clients have access to culturally competent service providers and language-appropriate services. For clients ineligible for medical insurance, our social workers identify programs offering no-fee services.

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

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

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

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

Our organizations are requesting \$3.4 million (\$850,000 each) for FY26. City Council funding for the Right to Family Advocacy Project is paramount. We request \$3.4 million (\$850,000 per organization) for FY26. This increase from the current \$650,000 per organization will enable us to meet the needs of a greater number of impacted families while also accommodating rising costs, including salaries, OTPS, health insurance, and space expenses. This support is not only an investment in families - it is an investment in justice, equity, and the future well-being of the communities we serve.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At the conclusion of an investigation, ACS determines whether the report should be “indicated,” resulting in the parent or caretaker’s name being placed on the State Central Registry (SCR). This listing then precludes them from many employment opportunities, even though whether a

¹⁶ *Interim Report to Chief Judge DiFiore*.

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

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

case is indicated is not usually subjected to external review because the case never undergoes judicial scrutiny. Indeed, the majority of indicated cases are never brought to court for review, yet the consequences are profound, lasting for decades and disproportionately impacting families of color.

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

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

Although there is an administrative process to challenge this outcome through hearings with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), parents generally lack access to counsel in these hearings. Yet, ACS is always afforded the benefit of counsel during these hearings. Decisions in these hearings often hinge on the interpretation of statutory and legal terms, such as “person legally responsible,” “collateral estoppel,” and “dismissed on the merits.” However, parents are not provided with an attorney to advise them of their right to challenge their listing on the SCR or to advocate on their behalf. In January 2022, the laws governing SCR hearings were overhauled, introducing a new legal standard and process. The interpretation of these new provisions is still being litigated in many hearings. Part of this change in law created a

¹⁹ <https://familypolicynyc.org/report/scr/>;

<https://nysba.org/new-york-state-bar-association-finds-child-welfare-system-replete-with-systemic-racism-pushing-for-reforms/>.

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

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

²² See N.Y.C. Dep't of Consumer Affs., *Lifting up Paid Care Work* (2018).

category of cases where a parent should automatically have their indicated case amended to unfounded, yet it is still necessary for parents to request OCFS hearings simply to have the law followed. It is crucial for them to have legal advocates helping them ensure this happens.

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

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

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

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

Our success in having SCR reports amended or sealed during FY25 — which ranged from 93% to 97% among our offices—has enabled parents to access employment and support their families. Data compiled from the four family defense organizations demonstrates the effectiveness of the Right to Family Advocacy Project. With City Council funding in FY25, the family defense organizations collectively assisted over a thousand parents and caretakers during ACS investigations and SCR administrative proceedings.

Through early advocacy and identification of appropriate services and resources, we avoided unnecessary and traumatic family separations, often preventing family court filings. This has led to significant fiscal savings for the city by minimizing removals and reducing court filings,

thereby conserving valuable court resources for cases where complex interventions are necessary. For instance, in recent years, approximately 86% of cases represented by BxD, and CFR during ACS investigations did not proceed to court. BDS similarly saw rates around 85% while NDS witnessed around 90%.

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

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

D. Community Outreach and Education about Parents’ Rights

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

BDS also created a know-your-rights website for parents entitled “Your Family, Your Rights” (www.yourfamilyyourrights.org), which was launched in 2021, and continues to be a valuable resource for families to increase knowledge about their rights and how to access legal support. We regularly refer community members to the website to provide legal information about ACS investigations and the State Central Registry. The website’s *Get Help* page—which offers information on how to contact an attorney for assistance is the most frequented page. The website also includes a know-your-rights presentation available for families to watch.

In 2024, BDS launched a public awareness campaign to inform families about their rights when facing an ACS investigation. In collaboration with JMAC for Families, a local community-based organization that works with parents impacted by the family regulation system, the eight-week

campaign reached New Yorkers inside MTA buses across Brooklyn, including Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville, East Flatbush, and East New York, the Brooklyn communities most targeted by ACS investigations. The campaign launch resulted in a 168% spike in active users and drew hundreds of new people to the website.

In Queens, Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island, CFR has been conducting outreach of its own, focusing on growing relationships with organizations that reflect the shifts in our client base. As of 2026, almost 30% of our clients are immigrants, many of whom require a variety of services beyond family defense. RTFA allows us to focus time and energy on outreach to some of the city's newest and most vulnerable populations during a time of increasing federal turmoil, and we hope our work can help prevent interactions with law enforcement agencies that might endanger our clients ability to call New York home.

III. City Council Should Advocate to Establish A New City Office of Family Well-Being within the Mayor's Office of Community Safety.

A new City Office of Family Well-Being is a critical part of the Mayor's approach to community safety and will ensure that families have access to the supports necessary to keep their children safe without ACS involvement. Over the past two years, advocates and city leaders have built a vision for enhanced community investment to strengthen family well-being and keep children safely together with their families and in their communities. Based on this vision, the Narrowing the Front Door Workgroup and the Innovation Team in the Mayor's Office of Policy and Planning have identified the need to create an Office of Family Well-Being which would provide community support to families that is disentangled from the investigation, surveillance and family separation integral to ACS's child protection approach. This Office would anchor a community approach to family support by investing in grassroots community organizations that ensure families find the support they need from organizations and people they trust.

The Office of Family Well-Being will:

- Ensure a holistic approach to family support policy, funding and programming so that city resources work better and reach more people.
- Support community-led planning and grantmaking to identify and build on neighborhood assets and fill gaps.
- Identify and create new, culturally responsive family programs that prevent and de-escalate family crises and promote family integrity, connection, resilience and safety.
- Prioritize investment and capacity-building support for grassroots organizations that families trust, with a focus on the neighborhoods most targeted by ACS and the youth justice system.
- Reinvest millions from new federal prevention funds and from cost savings due to reductions in ACS cases.

Funding this office is possible. This Office will include two programs currently under ACS jurisdiction - the Community Partnership Program and Family Enrichment Centers - which have an annual combined budget of approximately \$30 million in city tax levy, plus staff lines for oversight and planning support functions within ACS. Community planning and grantmaking functions at the pilot level are estimated at \$15 million. Ideally, NYC will baseline a family support funding stream, as it has done for young people aging out of foster care with Fair Future. At the state level, new federal reimbursements under the Family First Preventive Services Act can be reinvested in this Office. We urge the City Council to support this proposed public health approach to family safety which will prevent, interrupt, and heal families in crisis.

SUMMARY

We urge the City Council to continue supporting the Right to Family Advocacy Project and increase the funding from \$2.6 million to \$3.4 million. This increase is imperative to enhance our capacity and address the mounting costs associated with providing indispensable, high-quality legal services to vulnerable families navigating ACS investigations and scrutiny from the family regulation system.

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Testimony to the Committee on Children and Youth Submitted by Flex Dance Program

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the well-being of young people in our communities. Flex Dance Program (FDP) is a New York City–based nonprofit that works with justice-involved youth, youth in foster care, and young people from underserved communities through dance, mentorship, and creative expression.

We are deeply concerned about the mental health crisis affecting youth today.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of anxiety and depression among young people have significantly increased. The CDC has reported that nearly 1 in 3 high school students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in recent years. At the same time, youth screen time has surged, contributing to social isolation, disrupted sleep patterns, and decreased physical activity—all factors linked to worsening mental health outcomes. This is not just locally in New York City but seen Internationally as well.

We are also seeing increases in the number of youth in detention centers and foster care placements, as well as rising concerns about youth violence and school-based conflicts. Many young people are navigating trauma without adequate outlets for expression or support.

At Flex Dance Program, we have witnessed firsthand how dance can serve as a powerful pathway to healing. Dance provides a non-verbal outlet for young people to process emotions, reduce stress, and build confidence. Research has shown that physical activity—particularly expressive movement like dance—can significantly reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. Some studies suggest that structured dance interventions can be as effective, and in some cases more effective, than traditional treatments such as antidepressants for mild to moderate depression.

Beyond mental health benefits, dance fosters connection, discipline, and a sense of belonging. In our programs, youth are not only participants—they are leaders. Through youth advisory boards and peer leadership opportunities, young people help shape programming, mentor others, and develop a sense of ownership over their growth and their communities.

We believe that youth-centered, culturally relevant programs like Flex Dance are essential to addressing the challenges facing young people today. We urge the Committee to invest in:

- Arts-based mental health and wellness programs in schools and community

settings

- Prevention programs that address bullying, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation
- Expanded programming in detention centers and foster care facilities
- Youth leadership development initiatives that empower young people as decision-makers

Young people need more than services—they need spaces where they feel seen, heard, and valued. Dance has the power to create those spaces.

We welcome the opportunity to partner with the City to expand access to programs that support youth mental health, reduce violence, and build stronger communities.

Thank you for your time and commitment to New York City's youth.

Sincerely,

Flex Dance Program

Email: Flex@flexdanceprogram.org

Website: www.flexdanceprogram.org

Instagram: @flexin_flexout



Testimony - NYC Council Hearing: CHILDREN AND YOUTH BUDGET HEARING

March 16, 2026

Forestdale Inc. – Parenting Support Programs
Delivered by: Derek Carter, Director, Strong Fathers Program

Thank you, Chair and members of the Children and Youth Committee, for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of Forestdale Inc. For more than 172 years, Forestdale has stood with Queens families during their most challenging moments, ensuring that children grow up safe, supported, and surrounded by the people who love them. Today, the message I bring is simple and urgent: **prevention works, and wraparound supports keep families together.**

Across Queens, parents are navigating enormous pressures—economic instability, housing insecurity, trauma, and limited access to mental health care. These stressors don't just strain households; they increase the risk of child welfare involvement. But when families receive the right support early, crises can be prevented long before they reach the point of separation.

Forestdale's **Strong Mothers** and **Strong Fathers** programs are two of the most effective prevention tools in our borough. Together, they reach nearly 600 parents and up to 1,000 children each year. These programs rebuild attachment, strengthen parenting skills, and stabilize families experiencing conflict, domestic violence, or emotional distress. The results are powerful: in FY24 and FY25, fathers in our program saw dramatic increases in engagement and financial support for their children, and mothers reported improved emotional stability, safer home environments, and stronger bonds with their infants and toddlers. These are the everyday victories that keep children safe at home.

Our broader family-strengthening services show the same pattern: **95–97% of children in our preventive programs remain safely with their parents**, and **94–95% of children in foster care achieve strong well-being outcomes**. These numbers tell a clear story—**when we invest in prevention and wraparound supports, families stay intact and children thrive.**

Parents consistently tell us they want to succeed. They simply need community-grounded, culturally responsive, practical support—delivered in their neighborhoods, schools, shelters, and online. Forestdale is committed to meeting them where they are.



To continue this work, we respectfully request the Council’s continued investment in our parenting programs, including the \$200,000 in discretionary funding that sustains and expands these services. This support ensures we can maintain skilled staff, offer bilingual programming, and meet rising demand as more families seek help early.

The families we serve are your constituents—mothers healing from trauma, fathers rebuilding bonds, and children who deserve the chance to grow up safe and loved. With your partnership, we can keep prevention at the center of New York City’s child welfare vision and ensure that every family has the tools to thrive.

Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to the children and families of Queens and New York City.



Testimony - NYC Council Hearing: CHILDREN AND YOUTH BUDGET HEARING

March 16, 2026

Forestdale Inc. – Parenting Support Programs

Delivered by: Lakeraj Gangadin, Parent, Strong Fathers Program

Good afternoon, and thank you for giving me the chance to speak. My name is Lakeraj Gangadin, and **I'm here to share how Forestdale's Strong Fathers program changed my life and my family.**

Before I came to Forestdale, I was angry, frustrated, and lost. I didn't have custody or visitation with my child, and I didn't know who to turn to for help. The court and a friend recommended the Strong Fathers program, and I joined even though I didn't want to be there at first. I thought nothing could help my situation. As I engaged with the program, my class facilitator helped me shift how I looked at everything—teaching me to focus on the positive and see things from my daughter's and her mother's point of view. **My fathering specialist pushed me to challenge my old ways of thinking and to put my child's needs first, not my anger or frustration.**

One of the biggest changes for me was learning how to co-parent when the other parent doesn't want to engage. Before, I would argue and push, and it only made things worse. Once I started listening and responding to my partner's concerns instead of reacting out of anger, everything calmed down. **My daughter was more at peace, my partner was more at peace, and communication finally improved.** My relationship with my daughter is completely different now. At one point, she was calling me "uncle" instead of "dad," and it was hurtful. But through the program, I learned to understand her instead of getting angry. **Over time, our bond grew, and today she calls me "dad." That alone tells you how powerful this program is.**

This is why programs like Strong Fathers and Strong Mothers need continued funding. They help parents who are struggling with real issues—mental health, communication, staying connected to their children. I've even referred friends because of how much it helped me. **There were moments when I wanted to give up, but this program stood by me, supported me, and helped me become the best version of myself.**

Thank you for listening, and I strongly urge the Council to keep funding these programs so more parents like me can get the support they need.



**Testimony from Emma McKhann, Policy & Advocacy Intern at Girls for Gender Equity (GGE) before the New York City Council Committee on Children & Youth
March 16, 2024**

Good afternoon. Thank you Chair Stevens and Members of the Committee for this opportunity. My name is Emma McKhann, and I am the social work intern for Policy & Advocacy at Girls for Gender Equity (GGE). GGE is a Black feminist, intergenerational Brooklyn-based organization, reshaping culture and policy through advocacy, youth-centered programming, and narrative shift.

As a small, Black, queer and immigrant-led nonprofit doing critical racial, gender and sexuality justice and liberation work in the context of today's hostile world, the funding we receive is imperative to the development and growth of Black girls and gender-expansive youth of color across NYC. We request continued support from City Council for our FY27 youth programming, so that GGE may continue to address the needs of young people across all five boroughs during this critical period.

We are facing democratic erosion nationally and the normalization of sexual violence against girls and gender-expansive youth. The lack of accountability for perpetrators in the Epstein files paired with the continual presence of ICE in our communities is impacting the mental health of youth that attend our programs. Young people feel powerless, which our staff has to respond to in real-time by shifting program curricula, increasing 1:1's, updating safety protocols, and developing a whole new organizing arm and campaign to tend to current, real-world needs and re-empower our young people.

Furthermore, attacks against "DEI" and racial justice work have led foundations to steer away from funding our work. This year, GGE is facing decreased funding from across the sector, with funders reducing investment away from gender and racial

justice organizations. In response to these challenges, GGE has restructured by reducing staff and scaling back certain programs. This current FY, we are projecting a budget deficit of approximately \$1M, which underscores the urgency of securing multi-year, flexible funding and a stronger partnership with City Council to stabilize operations and sustain impact not just for GGE, but for **ALL** small organizations doing this critical work.

This is why we have formally launched the Alliance on Gender Equity, or AGE, and are requesting \$300,000 in the form of a new City Council initiative to sustain this work. AGE is a youth-led space for political education, civic engagement, leadership development and community-building for Black girls, queer and gender-expansive youth of color. The coalition consists of our GGE youth participants, adult co-conspirators and non-profit allies. We convene with partner organizations on a monthly basis to see how we can support and uplift each other with our unique and shared priorities as we face growing attacks against our work and our communities.

To help build the youth alliance, we held a Town Hall In November 2025 centering young BIPOC girls, gender-expansive and LGBTQIA+ youth from all five boroughs. We heard from them in six priority areas, with many issues coming up that are of direct interest to this Committee, specifically a demand for more youth advisory boards and representation in government. AGE turned these grievances and recommendations into a List of Demands for New York City and State, which is now the School G*rls Demand campaign, launched this month. We will share our demands and list of city-specific requests in the written submission, to keep this brief.

GGE is continuing to do the work and expanding our reach, despite financial constraints. With \$300k in support from City Council through the AGE initiative, we hope to continue equipping young Black girls, queer and gender-expansive youth to fight for a NYC that is resilient against harmful national forces working against them.

1. \$350,000 towards our Young Women's Advisory Council program funded by Young Women's Leadership Development Initiative (YWLD) for political education and empowerment,

2. \$200,000 towards our Sisters in Strength survivor program funded by the Domestic Violence and Empowerment Initiative (DoVE) initiative to support young survivors,
3. \$100,000 towards the Sports Training and Role Models for Success (STARS) Initiative to promote the physical, mental, social and emotional well-being of youth ages 12-24, and
4. \$250,000 in ATI funding to continue our youth organizing work surrounding racial disparities in disciplinary actions and school policies, and promotion of restorative and healing justice measures and Alternatives to Incarceration.

We hope you consider supporting us in these endeavors. Thank you.



**Testimony for New York City Council
Committee on Children and Youth
Committee on Education**

**Re: FY27 Preliminary Budget – Children and Youth
FY 27 Preliminary Budget – Education**

March 16, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support with the proposed budget. Graham has been providing support and services to children and families for 220 years and we are deeply committed to supporting our families and the needs of their school-aged children.

Graham is urging the City to address ongoing gaps in school transportation for students in the foster care system by investing \$3 million to provide interim transportation for students in foster care waiting for bus services to begin.

As the Supervisor of Education Services at Graham for the past 20 years, I know how important it is for students to have reliable school transportation starting as soon as they are placed in foster care or switch foster care placements. For students in foster care, being able to stay at their original school can be a critical source of stability during a very difficult and traumatic time for them. State and federal law recognize the importance of this stability by requiring school districts to provide transportation to students in foster care so they can stay at their original school and maintain their community and cultural bonds. However, it can take weeks or even months for New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) to arrange bus service—this is a grave disservice to the children.

Here are a few examples demonstrating why the City must provide interim transportation for students in foster care while they wait for bus service: Graham had a foster parent who faced repercussions at work because she had to bring a student to and from school every day while waiting for bus service; Graham agency staff were kept from doing other important work because they spent four hours or more per day transporting students to and from school; and where these troublesome interventions could not be arranged, students were simply unable to use rideshare because there were no adults to accompany them.

While the City offers prepaid rideshare service for students who are waiting for bus service, students must wait *ten school days* without a bus before this service begins. Furthermore, rideshare requires an adult chaperone to ride with the student – a task that is often impossible for foster parents with jobs or other children to manage (as demonstrated above). As a result, many students miss school or are forced to transfer schools even though it is not in their best interest to do so. In fact, during the 2024-25 school year, 55% of students in foster care were chronically absent—missing at least one out of every ten school days—and one in five transferred schools at least once.

There are feasible solutions. For example, the City could contract with transportation providers that use vetted drivers and do not require additional chaperones (such as Kid Car, which operates in NYC); use ACS or other city-owned vehicles that include escorts, as is done for students placed at the Children's Center; launch a dedicated interim transportation service for students awaiting bus routes; hire chaperones-aides to accompany students using rideshare services; or, at

a minimum, reimburse chaperone costs and increase the daily reimbursement cap to cover longer trips and services such as Kid Car.

The City must do more to support the education of students in foster care, including making sure they can get to school in the first place. The City should invest \$3 million to provide interim transportation for students in foster care awaiting bus service, ensuring uninterrupted access to school and a semblance of stability at a critical moment in their lives.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

In partnership,

Dawn Grant-Duffus

Dawn Grant-Duffus

Supervisor of Education Services/Youth Development

Fair Futures Middle School Program

Serving Grades 3K to 8

graham - EFFC Program

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**Harlem Junior Tennis and Education Program Testimony
City Council Budget Hearing: Committee on Children and Youth
Monday, March 16, 2026 at 9:00 am**

Thank you, Chair Stevens and members of the Council Committee on Children and Youth, for receiving this testimony. My name is Katrina Adams, President and Executive Director of the Harlem Junior Tennis and Education Program (HJTEP). We are a sports-based youth development program that delivers year-round services through after-school programming, summer camp in two locations, tennis instruction for hundreds of children as PE/gym curricula across twelve public schools, and multiple free tennis clinics in neighborhood parks and community spaces around Harlem. HJTEP was founded in 1972 headquartered in the 369th Regiment Armory on 143rd Street and is one of the 272 National Junior Tennis and Learning organizations of the United States Tennis Association Foundation (USTAF).

To support and grow our programming across Harlem, HJTEP is requesting operating support from the City Council. For Fiscal Year 2027 we are seeking **program support from our 3 local members** and a **\$100,000 Citywide allocation** on the Speaker's List or through a Citywide initiative. We are the youth tennis program of Harlem and respectfully request support from the Council.

HJTEP has a mission to build champions in tennis, education, and wellness. We serve New York City's youth ages five to 18, helping them develop essential life skills, providing academic enrichment, and creating pathways for our student-athletes to not only graduate high school, but also to earn college scholarships through both academic and/or tennis achievements. We use tennis as a vessel to provide deeper educational persistence and healthy lifestyle development for diverse and under-resourced youth. On court, HJTEP provides access for any child to receive tennis instruction, thereby closing the 'play equity gap' in our sport. Off court, the HJTEP Learning Resource Classroom (LRC) offers holistic academic and wellness support to registered youth through diagnostic academic and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) assessments of each child. With those baseline results, individualized roadmaps inclusive of academic tutoring, mentorship, ACT/SAT testing and college counseling, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) training, nutritional, fitness, mindfulness, and mental health counseling are activated for each child's successful progression and achievement.

During the school year, we serve approximately 800 students through after-school programs, and in-school tennis instruction as gym/PE programming. **During the summer months we enroll 150-300 students** in our beginners and tournament training summer camps. The majority (85%) of our registered student-athletes are from BIPOC (64% African American, 13% Hispanic, 8% Asian) and low-income populations. Once each child is registered for our after-school and/or summer camp tennis program, all of the holistic enrichment services provided by the LRC are delivered completely FREE-OF-CHARGE to their families. The actual cost to HJTEP to provide this full scope of services per individual child averages around \$13,000. Most HJTEP families receive scholarship support based on financial need, allowing their children, and often multiple siblings, to enroll and remain in our program regardless of their ability to pay full registration fees.

Our success is measured by our students' performance on court, in the classroom, and in life. HJTEP fosters confidence, teaches executive functioning skills, and builds character to become community leaders. Sports are a proven vessel for improving the physical health and development of youth. Athletics are also linked to greater academic performance, higher GPAs, and a higher likelihood of

attending higher education. HJTEP's youth progressively matriculate grade levels from their initial entry into our program and our lasting impact is reflected in the exemplary lives our students go on to lead. **HJTEP's high school students maintain an average GPA of 3.1 % and 100% of HJTEP's seniors graduate each year, 25% generally earn tennis scholarships to matriculate to college; and 65% of our graduates receive non-athletic scholarships and financial aid.** To provide perspective, the high school graduation rate within our Central Harlem community averages 67%. Many of our participants become the first in their families to attend college, some become competitive national tennis tournament players and champions through college and beyond. We are proud that our alumni go on to attend top institutions like MIT, Stanford, Georgetown, Spelman, Loyola, and Howard. One of our 2022 graduates is currently attending college in Rome on a 4-year tennis scholarship. And perhaps most notably, James Blake, former world-ranked tennis professional and philanthropist, is an HJTEP alum. Freshman Assemblymember of the 70th District, Jordan Wright is also an alum of HJTEP's program.

After-school and summer programming programs are essential for youth's long-term growth and development, as they enrich the lives of youth, building critical life skills and providing pathways to higher education and scholarship opportunities. HJTEP knows our programs enrich the lives of our students exponentially, as most stay with us for an average of 7 years. Many neighborhood families know of our services and the positive impact our programs have on the lives of Harlem's youth, which keeps our afterschool registration wait list averaging 500 youth each year. HJTEP is more than an afterschool program, summer camp, or junior tennis league; we are a multi-generational hub for youth and families across Harlem. Our students describe it as "a home away from home," a place where they are known, encouraged, and challenged to flourish with their unique gifts within the safety of our ecosystem. Our holistic approach has proven to be transformative. These transformations are especially visible in how our alumni continue to return to HJTEP as parents, tennis coaches, tutors, board members, and local elected leaders in our Harlem district. We are proud that they desire to stay connected to our organization and pay it forward to the next generations in the same ways they felt their futures were shaped by the leaders of their time.

With this background and expertise, it is important to note that HJTEP's irrefutable positive impact on the lives of New York City's youth is currently capped by the limited court space, insufficient learning space, restricted access given to our family members, and the limited operating hours within the Harlem Armory. And so, we have a vision to embark on a campaign to resolve our 500-youth waitlist by serving more youth while bringing our afterschool and summer programs within one state-of-the-art recreational hub in East Harlem. This new recreation hub will be designed as a beacon for recreation and an economic driver for the community; the embodiment of HJTEP's commitment to the brightest future for Harlem. With 14 (indoor/outdoor) tennis courts, 6 pickle ball courts, new learning spaces, and space available for other community organizations to utilize, we will triple our program capacity, introduce new programs for adults for the first time, and create dozens of local jobs, making a lasting impact for generations to come for our partners, investors, and New York City.

HJTEP remains honored to have local and CASA support from the NYC Council, and we look forward to the opportunity to share more information as our efforts toward this exciting goal further develop. Thank you for giving HJTEP the opportunity to join our voice with those from across New York City in urging the City Council body to consider increasing funds for programming for children and youth in the FY2027 budget cycle.



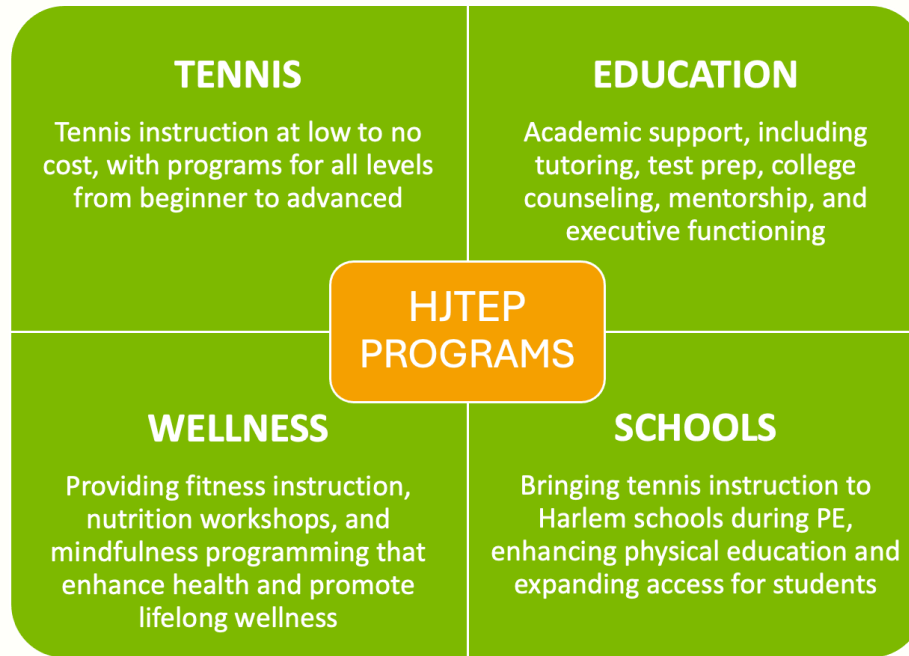
Harlem Junior Tennis & Education Program

Founded in 1972, HJTEP's mission is to develop champions in tennis, education, and wellness. It advances equity and opportunity for under-resourced youth.



WHO WE ARE

A 501(c)(3) non-profit tennis & education program which has served more than 28,000 youth in the vibrant community of Harlem and beyond for more than 50 years



WHO WE SERVE

- 1200+ youth ages 5-18
- 12+ Harlem schools
- 500+ annual waitlist
- 85% African American, Asian & Hispanic Participants

BUILDING CHAMPIONS IN LIFE



\$1M+

IN SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED ANNUALLY



97%

OF SENIORS GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL (3.1 GPA AVG)



90%

MATRICULATE TO COLLEGE



90%

RECEIVE ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIPS & FINANCIAL AID



25%

EARN TENNIS SCHOLARSHIPS



Althea Gibson East Harlem Campus

THE FUTURE IS NOW – HJTEP NEEDS A NEW FACILITY



Only four indoor courts to serve after-school programs



Academic tutoring held in a converted hallway



Limited space restricts parent and family engagement

\$75 MILLION CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

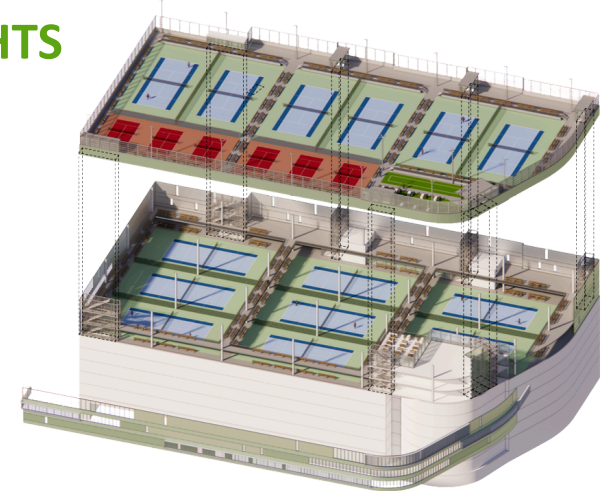
\$50 Million: Private Donations

\$25 Million: Public Funding

The funding goal of the HJTEP Capital Campaign is \$75 million which is the projected cost to build the facility. Through ongoing solicitations by HJTEP representatives, funding in the amount of \$25 million is being sought from municipal and state sources. The goal for private and corporate donors is \$50 million.

FACILITY HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 Indoor Courts
- 6 Rooftop Courts
- 6 Pickleball Courts
- Fitness Center
- Café
- 3 Classrooms
- Art Studio
- 4 Conference Rooms
- Administrative Offices



COMMUNITY IMPACT



The new facility will allow us to more than triple the number of young people we serve.



The expanded programs will enhance our ability to teach resilience, discipline, and teamwork through the sport of tennis.



A Hub for Community Partners

The campus will provide much needed space for local organizations to hold meetings and events.



The facility will create construction jobs during development and approximately 40 permanent jobs upon opening.

500+
Adults Served Annually



We will offer programs for adults and seniors for the first time, including clinics, leagues and fitness classes.

Good afternoon, my name is Nicole Carta with Healing New York. Thank you, Chair Stevens and the committee for the opportunity to testify today.

Founded in 1875 as the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Healing New York is the nation's first child protection agency. Today, our work focuses on two core areas: Clinical Services and Prevention.

Our clinical services include **Trauma Recovery** for children who have experienced child abuse and neglect. Using evidence-based therapy, our bilingual clinicians help children address anxiety, depression, fear, and post-traumatic stress disorder. We are a referral partner of ACS, the city's foster care agencies, and other child-serving organizations. Children can receive in-person and virtual therapeutic care, at no cost, for as long as they need to recover.

We also provide **Therapeutic Supervised Visitation** for families referred by the court system. These visits include coaching and therapy groups for both visiting and custodial parents to help families heal. We are one of only two providers of therapeutic supervised visitation in the City, and the only one that offers it **free of charge to families.**

This year, we opened our **Family Healing Center** with an emergency cash assistance program for urgent needs like utility bills and groceries. We're also working with a coalition of partners to help connect our families to broader social services when needed. Our approach ensures we are addressing the whole picture of need to help families stabilize.

Last year, **we served clients in 39 Council districts**, almost all of whom are low-income and come from predominantly Black and Latine communities.

Our second program, the **Training Institute**, focuses on prevention. We educate children, caregivers, and professionals about sexual abuse and online sexual

exploitation. Our school-based workshops fulfill the annual requirement under New York State's Erin's Law. We also train parents and caregivers on how to talk with children about these difficult topics, and support professionals in identifying, reporting, and preventing abuse, and recognizing and managing their own secondary trauma.

Last year, we held school trainings in **21 Council districts**.

We currently have a wait list for our programs. Council funding would allow Healing New York to hire additional therapists and expand our capacity to meet the overwhelming need. Thank you.

Contact

Daniel Senes

Manager of Government Grants & Relations

dsenes@healing-ny.org

(917) 672-3359

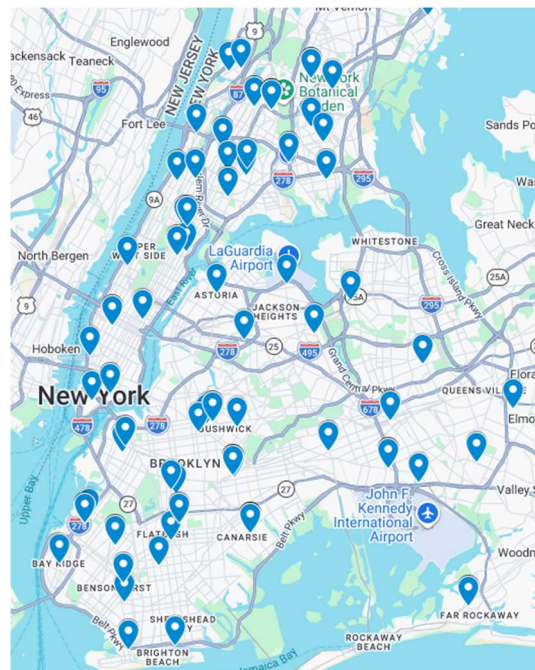


Incorporated in 1875, **Healing New York**, formerly known as the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, is the country's first child protection agency. With expert care and compassion, we provide child and adolescent trauma therapy, therapeutic supervised visitation programs, prevention programs, and material supports to help families rebuild stability and connection. We provide these services, free of charge, to children and families across New York City, almost all of whom are low-income and come from predominantly Black and Latine communities. **We have requested**

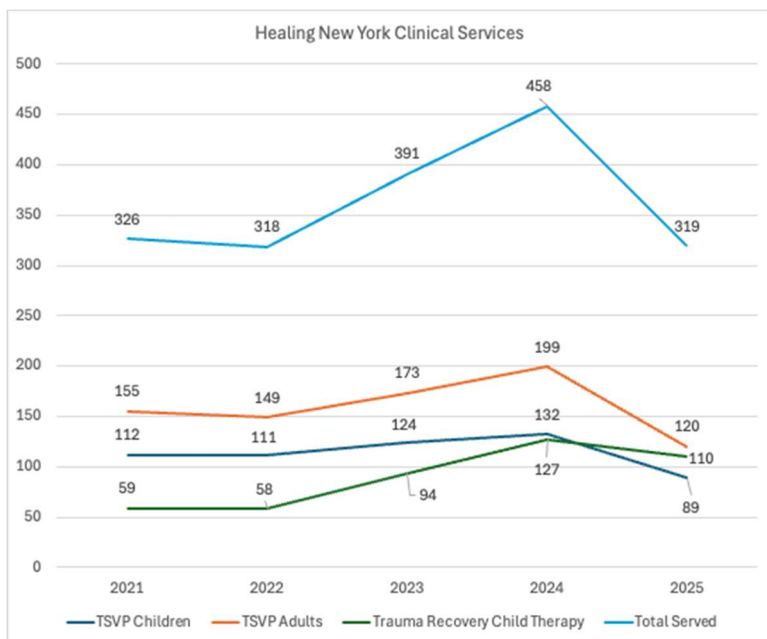
\$100,000 each for Speaker's Initiative funding to support the programs below (applications 2192137, 2247083, 2247324, and 2247493).

Trauma Informed Care

Children who experience the trauma of child abuse and neglect typically develop complex emotional and behavioral challenges. Recognizing our capacity in trauma-informed therapy, the NYC Administration for Children's Services, foster care agencies, and other child-serving organizations refer children with the most complex cases of abuse and neglect to our Trauma Recovery Program. Here, **children can access in-person and virtual therapeutic care, at no cost, for as long as they need to recover.** We help children and youth experiencing anxiety, depression, fear, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Our bilingual therapists help them through cognitive behavioral therapy and other evidence-based treatment approaches that best meet the needs of the child and their families. We include a treatment component for parents and other caregivers to help them learn the skills they need to support their children during the healing process.



In 2025, Healing New York's clinical services helped residents in **39 Council Districts**.

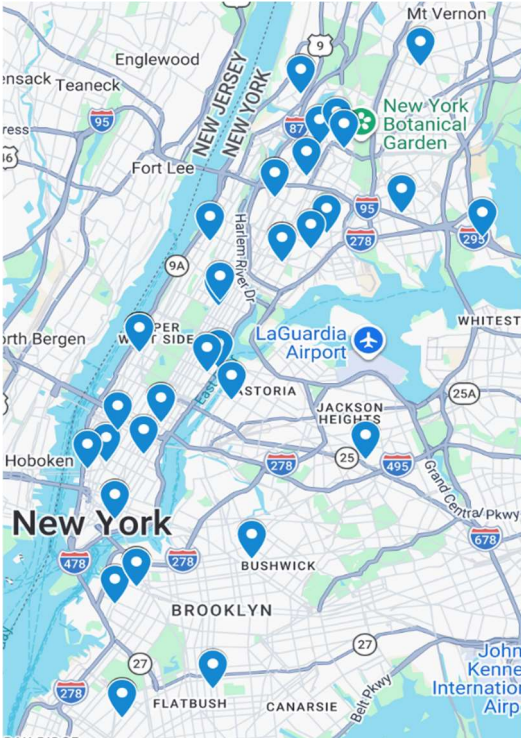


Therapeutic Supervised Visitation

Our Therapeutic Supervised Visitation Program serves families referred by judges after a determination that parent-child interaction must be supervised to ensure children's safety. We provide therapeutic supervised visits, coaching and Parenting Journey groups for visiting parents, and a specialized support program for custodial parents. Our therapists are specially trained to **provide culturally competent, trauma-focused care that fosters feelings of safety and trust, respects each family's cultural differences, and addresses their unique challenges.** We help parents recognize their strengths and feel supported to develop healthier parenting practices.

Family Healing Center

Opened in 2026, our new Family Healing Center provides a supportive, welcoming space where children and parents can heal together after experiencing trauma. Our Family Support Navigator **helps families to access critical resources such as food, housing, and healthcare**, and can provide small, unconditional emergency cash grants (*supported by private funds*) to our families facing immediate material needs, such as utility bills and groceries. The Family Healing Center ensures that we are addressing the whole picture of need to help families restore stability, build resilience, and reconnect with one another.



In 2025, child and professional training were held in schools across **21 Council Districts**.

about difficult topics such as preventing sexual abuse and exploitation. For youth-serving professionals, the Institute offers training on identifying, reporting, and preventing abuse; understanding trauma and using trauma-responsive practices; and managing secondary traumatic stress.

For more information, please contact:

Aysha E. Schomburg, J.D.
President & CEO
(212) 233-5500
aschomburg@healing-ny.org

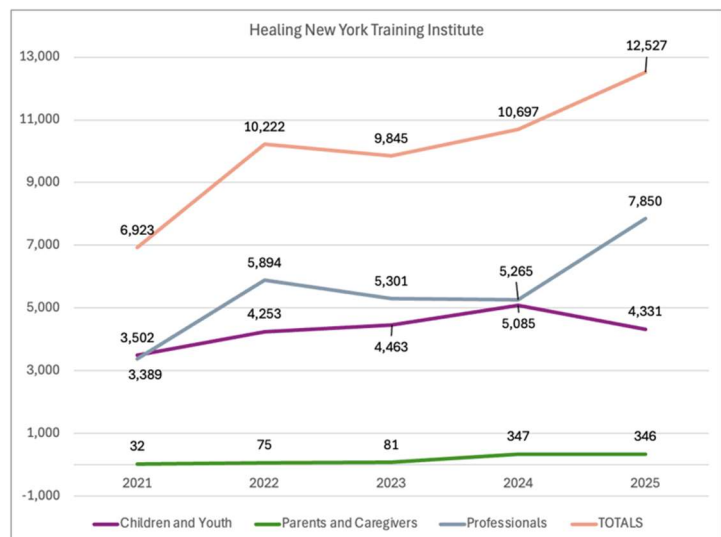
Daniel Senes
Manager, Government Relations
(212) 672-3359
dsenes@healing-ny.org

Training Institute

Each year, our Training Institute educates thousands of individuals on child safety through a comprehensive, three-pronged prevention approach that serves children, caregivers, and youth-serving professionals. While focused primarily on New York City, the Training Institute also trained more than 100,000 individuals worldwide since 2012.

In New York City schools, children and youth participate in classroom-based, developmentally appropriate workshops focused on **preventing sexual abuse and online sexual exploitation. Our workshops fulfill the annual requirement for grades K-8 under New York State's Erin's Law.** The Training Institute is known for its evidence-based Safe Touches© program for elementary-aged children, which uses puppet skits and discussions to teach children about body safety and how to seek help when needed. Safe Touches is offered in English and Spanish and has been adapted for children with autism.

The Training Institute also **provides parents and caregivers with workshops and tools to help talk with their children**



**Testimony of Joe Titus, CEO and Co-Founder of Hiveclass Before the New York City Council,
Committee on Children and Youth**

Good afternoon Chair Stevens and members of the Committee on Children and Youth. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Joe Titus, and I am the CEO of Hiveclass, a whole-child wellness platform that works with schools and youth programs to support students' physical health, mental well-being, and social development.

New York City's young people are facing real challenges today. Educators and families continue to report rising concerns around youth mental health, social isolation, and students' ability to build healthy relationships with peers. These issues directly affect students' engagement in school and their long-term academic success.

Research consistently shows that students who feel connected to their school community have better academic outcomes, stronger attendance, and better mental health. Programs that build communication skills, teamwork, and emotional resilience serve as an important form of preventative mental health support for young people.

At the same time, many students are still not receiving the physical activity they need during the school day. According to the Department of Education's most recent Local Law 102 physical education report, between 13 and 20 percent of students, depending on the borough, are still not receiving the required amount of PE instruction. In Manhattan alone, more than one in five students are missing required physical education. As schools continue to face challenges with space, staffing, and scheduling, it has become increasingly difficult to deliver consistent physical education during the school day.

That is why the City's investment in the Department of Youth and Community Development and the OST Compass program is so important. After-school programs provide something students cannot always get during the school day: time and space to build relationships, collaborate with peers, and develop confidence in themselves.

The community-based organizations that run OST Compass programs are doing extraordinary work providing these opportunities to students across the five boroughs, often serving families who rely on these programs as both a safe environment for their children and a critical support for working parents.

As the City continues expanding its investment in OST Compass, we encourage the Council to ensure that after-school providers have access to high-quality programming that supports physical activity, wellness, and social development. Structured activities—whether through sports, group-based learning, or wellness programming—help students practice the skills that allow them to collaborate, communicate, and build positive relationships.

Given the scale of the City's investment in after-school programming, supporting programs that strengthen student connection and well-being can help maximize the impact of this funding for hundreds of thousands of New York City students.

Thank you again for your leadership and your commitment to New York City's youth.



TESTIMONY

New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth
FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing

Submitted by:

Sierra Kraft, Executive Director, ICARE Coalition
March 16th, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens and members of the Committee on Children and Youth and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sierra Kraft, and I am the Executive Director of Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort (ICARE). We lead a coalition of legal services organizations dedicated to ensuring that unaccompanied immigrant children in New York City have access to free legal representation.

We are respectfully requesting \$18.6 million for the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative and \$2.6 million for the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status Initiative in the FY27 budget to sustain and expand access to legal representation for immigrant youth.

Our providers—Catholic Charities Community Services, Central American Legal Assistance, Human Rights First, Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), Legal Aid Society, The Door, Safe Passage Project, Lutheran Social Services, Children's Law Center, Lawyers for Children, Project Rousseau, and Immigration Law & Justice—are on the frontlines of this work every day, helping young people navigate some of the most complex legal systems in the country. Together, we operate a coordinated legal referral and representation network designed to ensure that no child has to face the immigration system alone.



Every year, thousands of immigrant children and youth in New York City are placed into immigration proceedings. Many arrived after surviving abuse, abandonment, trafficking, or violence. Others have reunited with family members here after years of separation. Nearly all are trying to stabilize their lives while navigating an adversarial legal system that even trained attorneys struggle to understand.

Yet under federal law, these children are not guaranteed an attorney. Without legal representation, children facing deportation have only about a 15 percent chance of success in their case. With representation, that number jumps to over 90 percent. Legal representation is the single most important factor determining whether a child can remain safely in the United States or is forced to return to dangerous conditions.

For more than a decade, New York City has been a national leader in recognizing that reality. Through investments like the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative, the City Council has helped ensure that thousands of immigrant children have access to counsel, stability, and a meaningful opportunity to pursue legal protection.

Since 2014, ICARE providers have supported more than 15,000 children and youth and help over 2,000 young people each year obtain legal protection and stability through humanitarian pathways like asylum and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status.

These legal services do far more than guide children through court proceedings. They connect young people to schools, healthcare, and community resources. They help stabilize families and ensure children can begin rebuilding their lives after profound disruption.



Legal representation is also a critical stabilizing force in a young person's life. When children have an attorney and trusted support, they are better able to stay engaged in school, access services, and focus on their development rather than living in constant uncertainty about their future.

This is a pivotal moment. The environment surrounding this work has become significantly more challenging. Legal protections for immigrant youth are eroding at the federal level. Policies are shifting rapidly, enforcement actions are expanding, and the legal pathways available to young people are becoming more complex and resource-intensive to navigate. Cases that once took months now often take years. Immigration courts are facing historic backlogs, leaving children in prolonged legal limbo while they try to attend school, support their families, and recover from trauma.

At the same time, providers are increasingly forced to respond to emergencies that were once rare. In recent months, legal teams have had to pursue complex federal habeas litigation simply to secure the release of detained youth who previously would have been released more routinely. Even children with pending or approved protections are facing detention and enforcement actions that require rapid legal response and significant staff time.

These shifts fundamentally change the nature of the work. What once might have been straightforward representation now requires far greater coordination, specialized legal expertise, and significantly more time per case. At the same time that cases are becoming more complex, the funding landscape that supports this work has become deeply unstable.



For years, legal representation for unaccompanied children has relied on an unstable patchwork of federal contracts, philanthropy, and limited state and city investment. That fragility became clear last year when federal funding for unaccompanied children’s legal services was abruptly halted nationwide through a stop-work order. Although the order was rescinded shortly afterward, it served as a stark reminder that these protections can disappear overnight.

Even when federal funding exists, it has never been sufficient to meet the scale of need. **The instability itself is the threat.** When funding collapses or stalls, legal service providers cannot hire staff, plan caseloads, or maintain consistent services—and children lose access to counsel at critical moments in their cases. This is why sustained city investment is so essential.

New York City has long recognized that ensuring access to counsel is not simply a federal responsibility—it is a local investment in stability, due process, and community wellbeing. But while demand has grown significantly in recent years, city funding for immigrant children’s legal services has remained largely stagnant. Providers are being asked to serve more youth with increasingly complex cases, while **thousands of children remain on waiting lists for legal help.**

Without sustained investment, the progress made through programs like the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative risks being reversed. Through UMFI, ICARE providers deliver coordinated legal representation, know-your-rights trainings, legal screenings, and referrals to critical social services for immigrant children and families across the city.

In addition, sustained funding for the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status Initiative is critical to ensuring that children who have already experienced abuse, abandonment, or neglect



can access the protection Congress created for them. Securing SIJS requires navigating both Family Court and federal immigration proceedings, a complex dual-system process that is nearly impossible for a child to manage alone.

Continued City Council investment will determine whether thousands of young New Yorkers have access to counsel—or must face removal proceedings alone. The young people we serve are students, workers, and future leaders in our communities. They want to finish school, support their families, and build stable lives in the boroughs they now call home.

Ensuring they have access to legal representation is not just about immigration policy—it is about child protection, stability, and the opportunity for young people to grow and thrive in the city they now call home. No child should be expected to stand alone in immigration court.

We urge the Council to include \$18.6 million for UEFI and \$2.6 million for SIJS in the FY27 budget. We've included additional details and funding breakdowns in the attached one-pagers.

Thank you for your time, your partnership, and your continued commitment to protecting New York's children.

In community,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sierra Kraft".

Sierra Kraft

Executive Director

ICARE Coalition

skraft@icarecoalition.org

www.icarecoalition.org

Defend Their Future: Sustain Legal Services for Immigrant Children and Youth

About ICARE: ICARE is a coalition of legal service organizations dedicated to expanding access to legal representation for immigrant children and youth facing deportation in New York City and advocating for universal access to counsel so no child has to face the immigration system alone.

The Challenge: In FY26, City Council made a significant investment in immigrant youth legal services, enabling providers to expand capacity, reduce waitlists, and reach more young people than ever before. That investment has made a measurable difference and we're deeply grateful. The need remains urgent.

Legal protections for immigrant youth continue to erode. Cases that were once straightforward now require significantly more time, coordination, and specialized advocacy, including federal habeas work to secure release for detained youth. Federal funding remains unstable, and more youth are facing detention and emergency legal needs. Without sustained investment, this year's progress could quickly be reversed, leaving thousands of youth to face court alone, with life-threatening consequences.

Every year, thousands of immigrant children and youth in NYC face complex immigration proceedings without an attorney. Without counsel, they have only a 15% chance of winning their case. With ICARE-supported representation, that rate jumps to over 90%.

What We Do: Through the Unaccompanied Minors & Families Initiative, ICARE providers deliver coordinated, high-quality representation to immigrant youth and families fighting deportation in NYC, including KYRs, legal screenings, direct representation, connections to city & social services, and centralized referrals to reduce duplication and increase efficiency.

Our Impact (Since 2014)	Screened 15,000+ children and youth for relief	Represented nearly 4,000 children and youth	Obtained relief for 2,000 children and youth
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Unaccompanied Minors & Families Initiative FY27 Discretionary Funding Request: \$18,559,420

Sustained City Council investment will determine whether **more than 2,000 young New Yorkers** and their families have access to counsel or must face removal proceedings alone.



No child should face the immigration process alone





Stability Is Protection: Protect SIJS Representation

About ICARE: ICARE is a coalition of legal service organizations dedicated to expanding access to legal representation for immigrant children and youth facing deportation in New York City and advocating for universal access to counsel so no child has to face the immigration system alone.

The Challenge: Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) is a federal humanitarian protection available to children who have experienced parental abuse, abandonment, or neglect. Securing SIJS requires navigating two separate legal systems, New York Family Court and federal immigration proceedings, a dual-system process that is uniquely complex and resource-intensive.

Federal backlogs and processing delays have created prolonged uncertainty for eligible youth. Even after SIJS approval, continued representation is necessary to secure lawful status and protection from deportation. Without sustained City investment, youth who qualify for SIJS risk remaining in legal limbo, or losing access to the protection Congress intended, protections the City has supported so these young people can thrive.

What We Do: Through the SIJS Initiative, ICARE providers secure Family Court findings, file and monitor SIJS petitions with USCIS, provide removal defense when necessary, and coordinate referrals across the city to ensure youth remain supported and able to move forward safely. SIJS representation protects children who have already experienced profound harm and provides a pathway toward lawful permanent residence.

Why It Matters: Without counsel, immigrant children are far less likely to secure relief. With representation, they can obtain lawful status, stability, and safety. SIJS is a statutory protection established by Congress. Continued City investment ensures that youth who qualify can meaningfully access that protection, remain safely and continue to build stable futures in New York.

In the first two months of this initiative, 215 youth were screened and 135 youth were matched to representation, a clear signal of both unmet needs and the importance of continued City support.

SIJS Initiative FY27 Discretionary Funding Request: \$2,575,000

Sustained investment will ensure that children and youth who qualify for SIJS can secure lawful status and long-term stability — rather than remain trapped in system that is impossible to navigate alone.



**No child should face
the immigration process alone**





Testimony by
Christine James-McKenzie, Director, Communications & Policy, JobsFirstNYC
before the
Hearing of the City Council Committee on Higher Education
Jointly with the Committee on Workforce Development
Oversight: Aligning Higher Education with Workforce Demand
February 27, 2026

Good afternoon, Committee, Chair Julie Won, Chair Rita Joseph, and distinguished members of the Committees. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of JobsFirstNYC regarding the urgent need to structurally align higher education pathways with real-time workforce demand in New York City. New York City does not have a talent shortage; it has a systems alignment challenge.

My name is Christine James-McKenzie, and I am the Communications & Policy Director at JobsFirstNYC. For 20 years, JobsFirstNYC has worked at the systems level to align education, workforce, and economic development institutions to expand economic mobility. To date, our partnerships have connected more than 20,500 people to education, training, and employment.

Despite improvements in aggregate labor market indicators, structural misalignment continues to limit young adults' access to clear, structured career pathways. As of late 2025, more than 106,000 young adults (ages 16–24) in New York City remain out of school and out of work (OSOW). These outcomes reflect not a lack of aspiration, but a lack of structured transitions between education and employment. The misalignment between higher education and workforce demand is visible in the data:

- Unemployment Disparities: The **unemployment rate for Black youth in NYC has reached 23.8%**—nearly double the rate for their white peers and significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels.
- Underemployment: Over **50% of employed 18- to 24-year-olds are working part-time**, often in low-wage, unstable roles that do not connect to degree progression or sustained wage growth.
- Neighborhood Concentration: These challenges are not geographically concentrated. Neighborhoods like **Mott Haven and Hunts Point face OSOW rates as high as 24.5%**, compared to single digits in more affluent districts.

Recommendations & Actions

1. Strengthen and Modernize Pathways from School to Work

- Universalize career exploration and work-based learning.

- Strengthen CBO–college partnerships through structured dual-enrollment pathways.
- Scale advanced career development across the education system.
- Move from employer insight to workplace opportunities as a core driver of school-to-career strategy.

2. Invest in Neighborhoods So Young Adults Can Thrive Where They Live

- Develop a unified place-based strategy for New York City.
- Prioritize under-resourced neighborhoods.
- Support community-led hubs that organize partners and resources.
- Integrate employer demand and youth voice into neighborhood strategies.

3. Build Next-Generation Work Solutions for a Changing Economy

- Build training models that strengthen durable skills and use modern systems to track shifting labor-market needs.
- Support universal childcare and pre-K as essential workforce infrastructure.
- Strengthen coordination through a dual-track approach and formal matriculation agreements between training providers and higher ed.
- Build an employer–workforce strategy that positions talent as core to economic development.
- Prioritize neighborhoods with the highest unemployment rates.

4. Prepare Young Adults for a Shifting Labor Market

- Conduct a citywide analysis of how technology and automation are reshaping early-career roles.
- Recognize that tech-readiness is not a niche issue—it is essential for success in healthcare, green jobs, and the public sector.
- Establish citywide standards for the responsible use of modern technology in hiring and training.
- Increase access to work-based learning that reflects the modern workplace.
- Engage young adults as co-designers in all workforce public initiatives.

5. Use Youth-Centered Data and Accountability to Drive Results

- Mandate annual reporting on youth labor-market intelligence.
- Embed youth employment outcomes in City economic and workforce plans.
- Fund long-term research and tracking on youth economic mobility.
- Build a longitudinal data system spanning pre-K through employment.
- Prioritize youth voice in data collection and interpretation.

Summary of Recommended Actions

The "entry-level" job is no longer truly entry-level. Employer expectations have shifted, traditional roles are shrinking, and higher education pathways must adjust accordingly. To address this, the City must focus on:

1. **Immediate Paid On-Ramps:** We must expand paid internships and apprenticeships, particularly through public sector agencies and in partnership with CUNY, as a direct response to shrinking entry-level roles and extended hiring timelines. These programs providing immediate income while building employer-validated experience.
2. **Formalizing Transitions:** We need formalized transition structures, including matriculation agreements and earn-and-learn models, that guarantee short-term training converts into degree-bearing or advanced credential pathways.
3. **Cross-Sector Preparedness:** Digital fluency is now a baseline requirement across all sectors including healthcare, green jobs, and public service. Postsecondary institutions and training providers must embed these competencies into core curricula.
4. **Place-Based Accountability:** City investments should be prioritized in neighborhoods with the highest youth unemployment and tied to measurable outcomes, including credential completion, wage progression, and employment retention.

These efforts should include transparent reporting on employment outcomes and early-career wage progression for credential earners.

Conclusion

We invite you to read and download the [Priority Actions to Increase Economic Mobility for New York City's Young Adults](#) on our website at jobsfirstnyc.org.

If we want a city that prioritizes economic mobility for all, we must build a system that responds to the labor market in real-time. JobsFirstNYC stands ready to help the Council implement these strategies.

Thank you.



**New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth
Hearing on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027
Monday, March 16, 2026**

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

Dear Chair Stevens and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Junior Achievement of New York (JA New York). We are the region's largest nonprofit dedicated to creating pathways to economic empowerment for young people from kindergarten through 12th grade. Our mission is to educate and inspire students to understand the economic world around them, plan for their financial futures, and maximize their potential.

Last year, JA New York provided more than 35,000 student learning experiences across the five boroughs through partnerships with over 130 public schools and community organizations, delivering programs that give students the tools to build financial stability, career confidence, and economic mobility.

As the City faces its most challenging fiscal outlook in more than a decade, we recognize the extraordinary pressures before you. We understand the need for responsible budgeting, but we respectfully urge the Council not to allow these deficits to force cuts to programs that directly support our young people's long-term success. During periods of economic uncertainty, investments in youth education, workforce preparation, and financial literacy are even more critical.

Nonprofit organizations like JA New York play an essential role in enriching classroom learning, particularly in schools and communities that are historically underserved and face significant economic challenges. Our programs give students practical, hands-on experiences that help them navigate the financial realities of adulthood and build confidence about their futures.

Last year, we opened the first permanent JA Finance Park facility in New York City—a major milestone for our organization and an invaluable new resource for New York City students. At Finance Park, young people engage in experiential learning where they create budgets, make spending decisions, and practice the responsibilities of household management in a simulated, real-world environment. This program strengthens skills that research consistently links to improved financial stability and economic mobility later in life, and it demonstrates the impact nonprofits can have when adequately supported.



Although the City's budget gaps are projected to deepen, it is especially important to maintain that support. Cutting funding for youth development and nonprofit partners may offer short-term savings but would come at great long-term cost. These programs help young people build the foundations for economic independence, support healthy communities, and contribute to a stronger future workforce—essential components of a resilient city.

We respectfully ask the Council to continue prioritizing investments in nonprofits that deliver high-quality education and economic mobility programs for young people. As you navigate this difficult budget cycle, we hope you will view organizations like JA New York as essential partners in preparing the next generation to thrive despite economic uncertainty. Protecting these resources now ensures that students have the support they need to succeed, contribute, and ultimately strengthen New York City's future.

Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your continued commitment to New York City's young people. We look forward to working with you to ensure they have every opportunity to build successful and fulfilling futures.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Betty A. Garger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, flowing "B" and "G".

Betty Garger
President and CEO



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

**FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 16th, 2026**

Testimony of Jieun Baek, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc.

Good afternoon Chair Stevens and members of the committee. My name is Jieun Baek and I am the Program Coordinator at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS). Founded in 1973, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS) is the oldest and largest Korean nonprofit organization assisting underserved communities across the New York City area. Our mission is to be a nexus of services for these communities, helping them maintain their health and wellbeing. In addition, KCS is a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), a coalition comprised of adult literacy teachers, program managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

For more than 20 years, KCS has provided adult literacy classes through city funding. Each year, the steady increase in both our student body and the number of classes offered stands as a testament to the success of our ESOL program and the ongoing need for adult literacy services in our communities. To best accommodate our students' busy schedules, we operate in-person and virtual classes Monday through Saturday, with flexible morning, afternoon, and evening sessions.

The impact of these classes cannot be overstated. Our students are driven by a desire to:

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- **Engage deeply** with their communities and neighborhoods.
- **Communicate effectively** with family members.
- **Advocate for their children**, particularly within the education system, ensuring they can stand up for their rights as parents.
- **Foster independence**, reducing their reliance on others for daily tasks.
- **Give back** through volunteering and civic participation.

Your ongoing support has been instrumental in driving these transformations, enabling our students to lead truly empowered lives.

As a program coordinator working directly with students, I have seen that the ESOL program means much more than simply learning English. This program serves as a gateway that connects low-income students with the broader community.

Through the ESOL program, we identify the challenges our students face and connect them with services tailored to their needs. These include workforce development, community engagement and civic participation, family literacy, digital literacy, and referrals to essential services such as healthcare and housing support.

In response, NYCCAL is calling on the mayor to **invest \$20 million in a new city adult education funding stream, Education for Integration and Equity, that would provide new seats and unfettered access to English language, basic education, digital literacy, high school**

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equivalency, and civics education classes for immigrant New Yorkers regardless of their status.

This investment would be in addition to the \$12 million included in the FY27 Preliminary Budget to continue to fund DYCD RFP-contracted adult literacy programs.

NYCCAL is also calling on the City Council to increase Council Discretionary funding for adult literacy education from \$14.5 million to \$18 million and to consolidate the two current Council Discretionary initiatives for adult literacy under Adult Literacy Forward.

City Council Discretionary adult literacy funding is vital—not only to KCS and the communities we serve but to over 60 programs across New York City. Increasing this funding by **\$3.5 million** would allow us to close the gap for thousands more New Yorkers who are in desperate need of adult literacy services.

Consolidating all City Council adult literacy funding and programs under Adult Literacy Forward would streamline the system, create uniform requirements for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs, and enable the City Council to have immediate access to all the data on services and outcomes for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs through the Council-funded NYC RISE data collection system.

I have personally witnessed the transformative impact of adult literacy education on our communities. By increasing funding, we can expand opportunities and provide critical services to the students who need them most. Thank you for your attention.

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

**FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 16th, 2026**

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

My name is Kathy Kim, and I am the Senior Program Manager at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS). Founded in 1973, KCS is the oldest and largest Korean nonprofit organization dedicated to serving underserved communities throughout the New York City area. Our mission is to act as a vital nexus of services, ensuring the health, wellbeing, and social integration of our community members. KCS is also a proud and active member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), representing over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library systems across all five boroughs.

In my role as Senior Program Manager, I have overseen the growth and evolution of our adult literacy programs, which KCS has provided through city funding for over 20 years. Every year, we see a consistent increase in our student body and the demand for more classes—a clear testament to the success of our ESOL programs and the persistent, critical need for these services in our neighborhoods. To support our students’ often grueling work schedules, we provide both in-person and virtual instruction six days a week, with flexible morning, afternoon, and evening sessions.

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The human impact of this education is profound. Beyond learning a language, our students are gaining the agency to:

- **Engage deeply** with their local neighborhoods and participate in civic life;
- **Communicate effectively** with family members and bridge generational gaps;
- **Advocate for their children** within the NYC education system, ensuring their rights as parents are respected;
- **Foster independence**, navigating daily tasks and healthcare without a translator;
- **Give back** to the city through volunteering and active citizenship.

Your sustained support has been the primary catalyst for these transformations. However, the current demand far outpaces our resources.

Therefore, NYCCAL is calling on the Mayor to invest \$20 million in a new city adult education funding stream: "Education for Integration and Equity." This initiative would provide new seats and unfettered access to English language, digital literacy, and high school equivalency classes for all immigrant New Yorkers, regardless of their status. This is an essential addition to the \$12 million already included in the FY27 Preliminary Budget for DYCD-contracted programs.

Furthermore, we urge the City Council to increase Council Discretionary funding for adult literacy from \$14.5 million to \$18 million, and to consolidate all initiatives under the "Adult Literacy Forward" banner.

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This funding is a lifeline for KCS and over 60 programs citywide. A \$3.5 million increase would allow us to close the gap for thousands of New Yorkers currently on waiting lists. Consolidating these programs will streamline the system, create uniform standards, and provide the Council with immediate, transparent access to outcomes through the NYC RISE data system.

I have seen firsthand how adult literacy education transforms a "struggling immigrant" into an "empowered New Yorker." It is time to show our students that we have their backs—not just with rhetoric, but with the necessary funding to ensure their success.

Thank you for your time and your continued leadership.

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

FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 16th, 2026

Testimony of Sophia Shi, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc.

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens and members of the committee. My name is Sophia Shi, and I am a Program Coordinator at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS). As a non-profit, our organization has been providing a multitude of services to underserved communities across New York City for over 53 years. In addition, KCS is a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), a coalition comprised of adult literacy teachers, program managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

At KCS, we have seen firsthand the importance and positive impact of adult literacy classes in our community. Recently, I spoke with a student who had been taking our ESOL classes for a year. Her initial goal was to improve her vocabulary and grow more confident in speaking with her community members. She is now pursuing a career in translation, with hopes to travel around the country. We've continuously seen students go above and beyond their initial goals, whether it's in their careers, education, or personal aspirations. Our adult literacy services have expanded over the years to meet increasing demand. However, like others, our resources are limited.

In response, NYCCAL is calling on the mayor to invest \$20 million in a new city adult education funding stream, Education for Integration and Equity, that would provide new seats and

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unfettered access to English language, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency, and civics education classes for immigrant New Yorkers, regardless of their status. This investment would be in addition to the \$12 million included in the FY27 Preliminary Budget to continue to fund DYCD RFP-contracted adult literacy programs.

NYCCAL is also calling on the City Council to increase Council Discretionary funding for adult literacy education from \$14.5 million to \$18 million and to consolidate the two current Council Discretionary initiatives for adult literacy under Adult Literacy Forward.

City Council Discretionary adult literacy funding is indispensable for over 60 programs and their communities across New York City. As the demand for adult literacy rises, current funding leaves thousands of New Yorkers in need. An additional \$3.5 million in funding would help these programs bridge the gap.

Consolidating all City Council adult literacy funding and programs under Adult Literacy Forward would streamline the system, create uniform requirements for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs, and enable the City Council to have immediate access to all the data on services and outcomes for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs through the Council-funded NYC RISE data collection system.

It is crucial to demonstrate to our community members that their interests have not been ignored by increasing funding for these essential programs.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

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

**FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 16th, 2026**

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

Good afternoon Chair Stevens and members of the committee. My name is Teresa Baik and I am the Director of Education at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS). Founded in 1973, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS) is the oldest and largest Korean nonprofit organization assisting underserved communities across the New York City area. Our mission is to be a nexus of services for these communities, helping them maintain their health and wellbeing. In addition, KCS is a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), a coalition comprised of adult literacy teachers, program managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

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347-923-0124

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND
RESEARCH CENTER (1)**

315 5th Ave, #705,
New York, NY 10016
Tel: 212-463-9685

2460 Lemoine Ave, #400P,
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Tel: 201-364-8375

103-04 39th Ave, #103,
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Tel: 917-396-4149

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND
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410 Broad Ave, #201,
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Tel: 201-429-2866

154-05 Northern Blvd., #301-A
Flushing, NY 11354
Tel: 718-939-6137

**WORKFORCE DEV
ELOPMENT**

31 W 34th St, Suite 7074
New York, NY 10001
Tel: 929-341-8302

410 Broad Ave. #201,
Palisades Park, NJ. 07650
Tel: 201-429-2866

EDUCATION

38-24 149th St.
Flushing, NY. 11354
Tel: 718-939-6137

**MENTAL HEALTH
CLINIC**

42-16 162nd St, 2FL,
Flushing, NY 11358
Tel: 718-366-9540

35-56 159th St., #2fl
Flushing, NY. 11358
Tel: 718-939-6137

410 Broad Ave. #201,
Palisades Park, NJ. 07650
Tel: 201-429-2866



- **Engage deeply** with their communities and neighborhoods.
- **Communicate effectively** with family members.
- **Advocate for their children**, particularly within the education system, ensuring they can stand up for their rights as parents.
- **Foster independence**, reducing their reliance on others for daily tasks.
- **Give back** through volunteering and civic participation.

Your continuous support has been the catalyst for these transformations, allowing our students to lead truly empowered lives.

In response, NYCCAL is calling on the mayor to **invest \$20 million in a new city adult education funding stream, *Education for Integration and Equity***, that would provide new seats and unfettered access to English language, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency, and civics education classes for immigrant New Yorkers regardless of their status. This investment would be in addition to the \$12 million included in the FY27 Preliminary Budget to continue to fund DYCD RFP-contracted adult literacy programs.

NYCCAL is also calling on the City Council to **increase Council Discretionary funding for adult literacy education from \$14.5 million to \$18 million and to consolidate the two current Council Discretionary initiatives for adult literacy under Adult Literacy Forward.**

HEADQUARTERS
(ADC | EDUCATION |
HR | IMMIGRATION |
PHRC | WF Develop.)

203-05 32nd Ave,
Bayside, NY 11361
Tel: 718-939-6137

100 Grove St,
Tenafly, NJ 07670
Tel: 201-541-1200

**OLDER ADULT
CENTER**

42-15 166th St,
Flushing, NY 11358
Tel: 718-886-8203

37-06 111th St,
Corona, NY 11368
Tel: 718-651-9220

633 W 115th St,
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City Council Discretionary adult literacy funding is vital—not only to KCS and the communities we serve but to over 60 programs across New York City. Increasing this funding by **\$3.5 million** would allow us to close the gap for thousands more New Yorkers who are in desperate need of adult literacy services.

Consolidating all City Council adult literacy funding and programs under Adult Literacy Forward would streamline the system, create uniform requirements for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs, and enable the City Council to have immediate access to all the data on services and outcomes for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs through the Council-funded NYC RISE data collection system.

I have seen firsthand the transformative impact of adult literacy education on our communities. It is time to show our students we have their backs—not just with words, but with a necessary increase in funding.

Thank you for your attention.

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HR | IMMIGRATION |
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Literacy Assistance Center

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

FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 16, 2026

Testimony of Ira Yankwitt, Literacy Assistance Center

Good afternoon Chair Stevens and members of the committee. My name is Ira Yankwitt, and I am the Executive Director of the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC), a 43-year-old nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening and expanding the adult education system and to advancing adult literacy as a foundation for equal opportunity and social justice. The LAC is also a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), a coalition comprised of adult literacy teachers, program managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

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

Currently, there is approximately \$103.5 million in federal, state, and city funding for adult literacy education in NYC. Over \$24 million of this funding comes from the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. The Trump administration had called for the complete elimination of this funding in the FY26 federal budget and may do so again in FY27. In the meantime, **the Trump administration is seeking to exclude students from federally-funded adult literacy classes based on their immigration status.**

Approximately 1.7 million of the 2.2 million adults in need of adult literacy services are immigrants, as are over 75% of current adult literacy students. Such restrictions could have a devastating effect on our immigrant communities.

In response, NYCCAL is calling on the mayor to **invest \$20 million in a new city adult education funding stream, Education for Integration and Equity, that would provide new seats and unfettered access to English language, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency, and civics education classes for immigrant New Yorkers regardless of their status.** This investment would be in addition to the \$12 million included in the FY27 Preliminary Budget to continue to fund DYCD RFP-contracted adult literacy programs.

NYCCAL is also calling on the City Council to **increase Council Discretionary funding for adult literacy education from \$14.5 million to \$18 million and to consolidate the two current Council Discretionary initiatives for adult literacy under Adult Literacy Forward.**

City Council Discretionary adult literacy funding has become vital to the 63 CBOs, CUNY colleges, and library programs that receive it. Increasing the funding by \$3.5 million would enable these programs - and potentially others - to serve thousands more adults in need.

Adult Literacy Forward is a nationally recognized, innovative model of funding. Since its inception as a City Council pilot project in FY22, it has consistently demonstrated that greater levels of investment in services, along with greater flexibility to meet community needs, yield greater outcomes and impacts for adult literacy students and their families. Consolidating all City Council adult literacy funding and programs under Adult Literacy Forward would streamline the system, create uniform requirements for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs, and enable the City Council to have immediate access to all the data on services and outcomes for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs through the Council-funded NYC RISE data collection system.

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

Thank you for your attention.



Education for Integration and Equity:
Ensuring Access and Opportunity for Immigrant New Yorkers

(November 2025, Updated March 2026)

The New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL) is pleased to present this proposal for a **new \$20 million city investment in adult education that would provide new seats and unfettered access to English language, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency, and civics education classes for immigrant New Yorkers regardless of their status.**

Education for Integration and Equity would expand access to a continuum of educational and support services for thousands of immigrants in need. It would also mitigate the potential loss of services that would result from the Trump administration's threatened cuts and changes to the federal adult literacy funding that currently flows through the NYS Education Department to community-based organizations, CUNY colleges, and libraries in NYC.

Education for Integration and Equity is modeled on the highly successful [New York City Adult Literacy Pilot Project](#) and draws on the [Migration Policy Institute's English Plus Integration](#) model, ensuring that immigrant adult students will be provided with tailored curriculum and instruction and an expansive array of wraparound services and supports, opening the doors to greater economic opportunity and facilitating fuller integration into the social and political fabric of New York City.

Background

New York City is home to 1.7 million immigrants over the age of 17 who have limited English proficiency or lack a high school diploma. These New Yorkers are overwhelmingly poor and working-class. According to an analysis of the 2023 American Community Survey, two-thirds of New Yorkers with limited English proficiency and three-quarters of New Yorkers without a high school diploma earn less than \$25,000 a year. Adult education can provide the foundation for greater economic security and autonomy, as well as the tools to successfully navigate the social, political, and economic systems and conditions that these immigrants confront.

A recent randomized evaluation of a midsize community-based adult English language training program in Massachusetts found that participation in the program **doubled voter participation**, **increased annual earnings** relative to the control group, and **increased tax revenue** from earnings gains, generating a 6 percent return for taxpayers. Moreover, in addition to leading to higher earnings, adult education prepares participants for post-secondary education and job training programs; and it enables immigrants with foreign degrees to develop English language proficiency and earn credentials to utilize their professional skills in the U.S. workforce.

Yet, despite these benefits, combined city and state funding for adult literacy education is so limited that fewer than 3% of New Yorkers in need can access adult basic education (ABE), high school equivalency (GED), or ESOL classes in any given year.

Currently, there is approximately \$103.5 million in federal, state, and city funding for adult literacy education in NYC. Approximately \$52 million of these funds are allocated to community-based organizations, CUNY colleges, and the three library systems. Over \$20 million of the \$52 million in funding comes from federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) dollars that flow through the NYS Education Department. This \$20 million in federal dollars currently funds ABE, GED, and ESOL classes for approximately 14,000 students in NYC. The Trump administration had called for the complete elimination of this funding in the FY26 federal budget and may do so again in FY27. In the meantime, **the administration is seeking to exclude students from federally-funded adult literacy classes based on their immigration status.**

Foundational Components

Education for Integration and Equity is designed to meet the moment and expand educational opportunities. As a complement to the Department of Youth & Community Development's (DYCD's) adult literacy contracts that support classes for both immigrants and non-immigrants, *Education for Integration and Equity* would be focused uniquely on programming for immigrants. There would be no documentation or eligibility requirements based on status. The funding would be multi-year, baseline funded and distributed through an RFP process administered by DYCD. Eligible providers would include community-based organizations, CUNY colleges, and public libraries.

In July 2021, the New York City Council launched the Adult Literacy Pilot Project, providing \$2.5 million in discretionary funding to 19 community-based adult literacy programs to significantly enhance their services and supports, and to achieve a wider range of outcomes and impacts for adult literacy students, their families, and their communities. Unlike most adult literacy funding streams that only focus on educational gains and employment outcomes, the Adult Literacy Pilot Project recognized student gains and program impacts in all the following areas:

1. Digital Literacy
2. Health Literacy
3. Family Literacy
4. Financial Literacy
5. Immigrant Rights
6. Housing Rights
7. Workers' Rights
8. Culturally Responsive/Sustaining Education
9. Student Leadership Development
10. Civic Participation
11. Community Engagement
12. Citizenship Preparation
13. Engagement in Children's Schooling
14. Work Readiness
15. Job Placement/Job Improvement
16. Legal and/or Social Services Accessed
17. Material Support Accessed (e.g., food aid, cash assistance)
18. Educational Development

After three successful years, the City Council expanded the Pilot in FY25 to 42 programs and \$7.86 million. It established an innovative funding model that provided both greater investment and greater flexibility. In FY25, the project strengthened program services and provided new classes for 5,290 students. In FY26, the Council renewed this funding and renamed it Adult Literacy Forward.

Education for Integration and Equity is modeled on the Adult Literacy Pilot Project/Adult Literacy Forward and informed by the Migration Policy Institute's English Plus Integration model. An RFP would be released in early FY27, with a projected start date of July 1, 2027 (i.e., the beginning of FY28). Programs would be funded at a rate of \$485 per Instructional Hour, creating over 41,000 hours of new instruction. (The \$485 Instructional Hour rate is based on the current Adult Literacy Forward rate of \$425 per Instructional Hour, adjusted for projected inflation.) Assuming classes that meet for six hours per week for 40 weeks, this would create over 170 new adult education classes citywide. Each program would be awarded a minimum of \$349,200, ensuring that they could provide at least three such classes over the course of the year.

With the Trump administration's targeting and terrorizing of immigrants, it is imperative that New York City remain a sanctuary where immigrants are provided with the resources they need to live freely, contribute, and thrive. Historically, community-based adult literacy programs have played a vital role in support for the newest New Yorkers. Even before the increased funding provided by the Council's Pilot Project, community-based adult literacy programs took a holistic approach to their students, providing them with the education they seek while opening the door to an array of other critical services, either directly or through established partnerships.

Education for Integration and Equity would build on this paradigm.

Conclusion

Adult education is an issue of racial, social, and economic justice. The majority of immigrants in adult education programs in NYC are from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. They are New Yorkers who live on the frontlines of struggles for workers' rights, civil rights, and human rights. English language and literacy skills give immigrants the power to understand and command information, to communicate in the language of access, to make more informed choices, to secure critical resources and opportunities, to stand up for themselves in the workplace, to fully participate in civic institutions and, ultimately, to transform their lives and the world around them.

A new \$20 million investment in *Education for Integration and Equity* will expand classes and/or mitigate losses in services and access due to potential federal funding cuts and/or eligibility constraints. **This funding will ensure that more immigrants will have the foundational skills they need to secure better jobs and higher wages, to better support their children's education, to know and speak up for their rights, to live safer and healthier lives, and to more fully participate in the cultural and civic life of New York City.** It is also a sound investment in the city's economic future.

For more information, contact: Ira Yankwitt, Executive Director, Literacy Assistance Center, iray@lacnyc.org, 212-803-3302.

**New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth
Honorable Althea Stevens, Chair
FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 16, 2026**

**Testimony of Kaveh Sarfehjooy
Executive Director, Liz Smith Center for Adult & Family Learning
Literacy Partners**

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens and members of the committee. My name is Kaveh Sarfehjooy, and I am the Executive Director of the Liz Smith Center for Adult & Family Learning at Literacy Partners, a 50-year-old nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening literacy across generations.

Since 1973, Literacy Partners has supported tens of thousands of adults, parents, and caregivers in building the literacy skills they and the children in their lives need to thrive. Our model advances literacy two generations at a time, because when we invest in parents and caregivers, we also invest in the futures of their children.

We are also a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy, or NYCCAL, a coalition of adult literacy teachers, program leaders, students, and allies from more than 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

As you know, more than 2.2 million adults in New York City have limited English proficiency or do not have a high school diploma. Yet public funding for adult literacy is so limited that fewer than 3% of those New Yorkers can access adult basic education, GED, or ESOL classes in any given year.

Right now, adult literacy education in New York City depends on approximately \$103.5 million in federal, state, and city funding. More than \$24 million of that comes from the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. The Trump administration has already called for eliminating this funding in the FY26 federal budget and may do so again in FY27. At the same time, the administration is seeking to exclude students from federally funded adult literacy classes based on immigration status.

The impact of those restrictions would be devastating. About 1.7 million of the 2.2 million adults in New York City who need adult literacy services are immigrants, and immigrants make up more than 75% of current adult literacy students. If those restrictions move forward, the communities with the greatest need will be the ones most shut out.

That is why NYCCAL is calling on the Mayor to invest \$20 million in a new city adult literacy funding stream: Education for Integration and Equity. This funding would create new seats and ensure access to English language instruction, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency, and civics education classes for immigrant New Yorkers regardless of status.

This investment must be in addition to the \$12 million included in the FY27 Preliminary Budget to continue funding DYCD RFP-contracted adult literacy programs. NYCCAL is also calling on the City Council to increase discretionary funding for adult literacy from \$14.5 million to \$18 million and to consolidate the two current Council discretionary initiatives under Adult Literacy Forward.

City Council discretionary funding has become essential to the 63 community-based organizations, CUNY colleges, and library programs that rely on it. Increasing that funding by \$3.5 million would allow these programs, and potentially others, to serve thousands more adults in need.

Adult Literacy Forward is a nationally recognized and innovative funding model. Since its launch as a City Council pilot in FY22, it has shown that when programs have both stronger investment and more flexibility to respond to community needs, they produce stronger results for adult learners and their families. Consolidating all City Council adult literacy funding under Adult Literacy Forward would streamline the system, create more consistent requirements across programs, and give the Council immediate access to services and outcomes data through the Council-funded NYC RISE system.

Adult literacy education expands opportunity for immigrants, advances gender equity, and moves educational and racial justice forward. New York City must show that it is committed to those values and that it will not leave immigrant communities behind.

In closing, I want to share the words of one of our students, Yessenia, who asked us to share her story in spaces where decisions are made that affect families and children who depend on free literacy classes and services. Yessenia was detained during a routine immigration status appointment. During that detention, she was separated from her husband and her child, who has Autism Spectrum Disorder, for five days.

She said, "In the detention center, everything was in English, and everyone spoke English. I became the translator for the friends I made from other countries who were also detained, helping them communicate their basic needs because they didn't know how to ask for things in English — even something as simple as water."

She continued, "With the little English I learned in these classes, I was able to help them get the necessities they needed. That experience gave me the confidence to speak without fear — not only to advocate for myself, but also for others who had no way to communicate."

The English Yessenia used to advocate for herself and for others was learned, in part, through free parent-focused ESL classes. She credits that learning as instrumental in helping her navigate detention, support others while inside, and reunite with her family.

Thank you for your attention.



Education for Integration and Equity:
Ensuring Access and Opportunity for Immigrant New Yorkers

(November 2025, Updated March 2026)

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Education for Integration and Equity would expand access to a continuum of educational and support services for thousands of immigrants in need. It would also mitigate the potential loss of services that would result from the Trump administration's threatened cuts and changes to the federal adult literacy funding that currently flows through the NYS Education Department to community-based organizations, CUNY colleges, and libraries in NYC.

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A recent randomized evaluation of a midsize community-based adult English language training program in Massachusetts found that participation in the program **doubled voter participation, increased annual earnings** relative to the control group, and **increased tax revenue** from earnings gains, generating a 6 percent return for taxpayers. Moreover, in addition to leading to higher earnings, adult education prepares participants for post-secondary education and job training programs; and it enables immigrants with foreign degrees to develop English language proficiency and earn credentials to utilize their professional skills in the U.S. workforce.

Yet, despite these benefits, combined city and state funding for adult literacy education is so limited that fewer than 3% of New Yorkers in need can access adult basic education (ABE), high school equivalency (GED), or ESOL classes in any given year.

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Foundational Components

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- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Digital Literacy | 10. Civic Participation |
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| 9. Student Leadership Development | 18. Educational Development |

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With the Trump administration's targeting and terrorizing of immigrants, it is imperative that New York City remain a sanctuary where immigrants are provided with the resources they need to live freely, contribute, and thrive. Historically, community-based adult literacy programs have played a vital role in support for the newest New Yorkers. Even before the increased funding provided by the Council's Pilot Project, community-based adult literacy programs took a holistic approach to their students, providing them with the education they seek while opening the door to an array of other critical services, either directly or through established partnerships.

Education for Integration and Equity would build on this paradigm.

Conclusion

Adult education is an issue of racial, social, and economic justice. The majority of immigrants in adult education programs in NYC are from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. They are New Yorkers who live on the frontlines of struggles for workers' rights, civil rights, and human rights. English language and literacy skills give immigrants the power to understand and command information, to communicate in the language of access, to make more informed choices, to secure critical resources and opportunities, to stand up for themselves in the workplace, to fully participate in civic institutions and, ultimately, to transform their lives and the world around them.

A new \$20 million investment in *Education for Integration and Equity* will expand classes and/or mitigate losses in services and access due to potential federal funding cuts and/or eligibility constraints. **This funding will ensure that more immigrants will have the foundational skills they need to secure better jobs and higher wages, to better support their children's education, to know and speak up for their rights, to live safer and healthier lives, and to more fully participate in the cultural and civic life of New York City.** It is also a sound investment in the city's economic future.

For more information, contact: Ira Yankwitt, Executive Director, Literacy Assistance Center, iray@lacnyc.org, 212-803-3302.

**NYCCAL Proposals to Increase NYC Adult Literacy Funding from
\$26.5 million to \$50 million**

<u>Name of Funding Stream</u>	<u>FY26 Budgeted Amount</u>	<u>Current Status</u>	<u>NYCCAL Ask for FY27</u>
DYCD Literacy RFP	~\$12M	Multiyear Contracts Funding is currently included in the Mayors Preliminary Budget	NONE/ NO CHANGE
Education for Integration and Equity	NA	Proposal for a new multiyear funding stream to be contracted through DYCD Goal is to get the Council to include this ask in their response to the Preliminary Budget and to have the Mayor include it in the Executive Budget in April	\$20M

City Council Adult Literacy Initiative	~\$6.5M	Discretionary – Year to Year Will be negotiated in the final round of budget talks (May – June)	FOLD THIS \$6.5M INTO ADULT LITERACY FORWARD
City Council Adult Literacy Forward (formerly “Pilot”)	~\$8M	Discretionary – Year to Year Will be negotiated in the final round of budget talks (May – June)	ADD THE \$6.5M FROM THE INITIATIVE AND INCREASE AN ADDITIONAL \$3.5M FOR A TOTAL OF \$18M
Total	~\$26.5M		\$50M



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**Testimony from the Lower Eastside Girls Club
City Council FY 27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Committee on Children and Youth
March 16, 2026**

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens and members of the Committee on Children and Youth. My name is Kiyanna Braveboy, and I am a youth member of the Lower Eastside Girls Club. The Girls Club has been a second home and a launchpad for me — a place where I have discovered my voice, built confidence, and learned that my future is full of possibilities. I am here today to speak on behalf of our community and to urge your continued investment in an organization that has been showing up for New York City's young people for nearly 30 years.

Since 1996, the Lower Eastside Girls Club (LESGC) has been connecting young women and gender-expansive youth to healthy and successful futures filled with Joy, Power, and Possibility. For three decades, through recessions, a pandemic, and shifting political landscapes, the Girls Club has never closed its doors. It has only grown — from a basement on Avenue D to a 35,000-sq-ft community anchor, and now the Center for Wellbeing & Happiness, serving every generation on the Lower East Side.

LESGC serves youth from across the five boroughs, reaching young people from 27 zip codes. Youth Programming covers three key areas: 1) **Education, Equity, and Access** through STEM, Digital Media, Arts, Design, Movement, and Wellness; 2) **Economic Mobility and Opportunity**: connecting hundreds of youth annually with internships, mentors, training, and college and career exploration; and 3) **Civic Leadership**: through New Girl City and the STARS coalition, LESGC is building a diverse pipeline of advocates, activists, and policymakers for the future of New York City. I have personally experienced this — through participating in Girls Club programming, including STARS, I have discovered that my voice matters and that change is possible.

In 2025, Girls Club reached over 1,300 youth ages 10–23: 95% of youth members show gains in key social-emotional capacities; 95%+ graduate from high school; 90%+ pursue higher education; and 100% report knowing their voices matter. Through New Girl City, 100% of participants reported a likelihood to vote, and 95% reported increased interest in civics and activism. The Community Food Pantry and CSA serve over 2,200 Lower East Side residents each month, including 250 Girls Club families.

And the need has never been greater. According to the Citizens Committee of Children of NYC: *Keeping Track on New York Children 2024 Report*, growing income inequality keeps hundreds of thousands of NYC children living below the Federal Poverty Level. More than 80% of NYC families cannot afford child care or after-school care, and over 100,000 public school students

live in temporary housing. An estimated 38% of NYC High School youth report symptoms of depression. Black and Latinx youth are disconnected from school and employment at more than double the rate of their white peers.

Community-based youth programs like LESGC are essential to addressing the youth mental health and affordability crises in NYC. Operating outside of schools and within neighborhoods, these organizations are valuable assets for youth, families, and communities alike (Gootman & Eccles, 2002; Vandell et al., 2015). A recent study by the Wallace Foundation highlights how culture-centered, community-based youth programs provide vital spaces to support the well-being and well-becoming of young people (Osai et al., 2025).

Despite 30 years of proven impact, funding has become increasingly unreliable. In 2023, over 190,000 (18%) children and youth in public schools were reached through DYCD after-school programs — yet DYCD cut key programs in FY24, negatively impacting youth services citywide. LESGC lost two critical DYCD grants: Compass Explorer (\$65,765) and Adolescent Literacy (\$108,274). City government contracts have become chronically delayed, putting LESGC and nonprofits across the city in a precarious cash-flow position. According to the NY Council of Nonprofits' State of the Sector report, 62% of NY nonprofits are concerned about funding basic operations.

Beyond government funding cuts, LESGC confronts the ongoing attack on DEI initiatives and broader fiscal uncertainty, which have negatively affected philanthropic giving from corporate donors, private foundations, and individual donors. Through disciplined budgeting and careful stewardship in Fiscal Year 2025, the organization has stabilized its finances and is projected to end FY26 with a balanced budget — a testament to the resilience that has defined this organization for 30 years. But sustaining that momentum requires the City Council's partnership.

A Note on Sector-Wide Capacity

We also want to draw this Committee's attention to a structural challenge facing the broader nonprofit sector — one that LESGC shares with our partners across the STARS coalition.

In the current fiscal climate, nonprofits are facing rising expectations, compliance requirements, and expanded community needs without corresponding growth in organizational capacity. Investing in core infrastructure is no longer optional. It is essential to sustain responsible and effective service delivery. Administrative, operational, and staffing capacity have not kept pace with programmatic demand. Without targeted support for organizational sustainability, deepening services would strain limited resources and compromise long-term impact.

As members of STARS — a women-led collective of girl-serving organizations — we are working collectively to address these systemic constraints. The majority of staff across the network identify as women or gender-expansive leaders, and together we are advancing a shared approach to strengthening organizational health through sustainable operations, shared learning, and responsible resource allocation. With this reality in mind, we are requesting a \$50,000 funding enhancement per partner organization to strengthen staffing, systems, and operational infrastructure needed to meet expanded deliverables and accountability standards. This

enhancement would increase the initiative's total budget from \$1.4 million to \$1.9 million, including an increase for LESGC from \$100,000 to \$150,000.

This request reflects a straightforward reality: expectations have increased, capacity has not. By prioritizing capacity-building, the City Council can help stabilize essential community organizations, protect service quality for girls and families, and support a more resilient nonprofit sector overall.

Our Request

LESGC is requesting **\$1,090,000 from the City Council in FY27**, including **\$150,000 for STARS** and **\$125,000 for New Girl City**. This investment will:

- **Invest in a Proven Solution:** Support an organization with nearly 30 years of demonstrated success uplifting young women and gender-expansive youth in NYC.
- **Address Urgent Needs:** Provide critical resources to tackle the youth mental health crisis through culturally relevant, community-based approaches.
- **Create Lasting Change:** Promote long-term economic mobility by investing in college readiness, career exploration, and comprehensive wraparound support.
- **Nourish Community:** Sustain the Community Food Pantry and subsidized CSA, which serve over 2,200 LES residents monthly — including 250 Girls Club families — and represent a critical food justice infrastructure on the Lower East Side.

Thirty years ago, women in the Lower East Side came together to create a safe space for girls where none existed. That effort to build a Girls Club changed thousands of lives — including mine. General operating support from the City Council would help secure Lower Eastside Girls Club's legacy as a transformative force in youth development and expand its impact for generations to come. Without spaces like this, I and so many young women like me would not have the resources, the mentors, or the confidence to stand here and speak up for our community.

Thank you for your consideration.



**Make the Road NY
Testimony: FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Committee on Children & Youth
March 16, 2026**

Good afternoon, my name is Yessenia Serra, Adult Literacy Intake & Data Coordinator at Make the Road New York. Make the Road is the largest grassroots immigrant organization in the state, serving 30,000 immigrant and working-class New Yorkers per year, the majority of them in New York City. Based out of our centers in Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island, we support New Yorkers to resolve immigration legal issues, fight landlord harassment, win back stolen wages, access healthcare, improve their English, express themselves through youth arts programs, and more. Thank you Chair Stevens and the City Council for your support of our legal, health, adult education and youth arts services, and thank you to DYCD for partnering with us.

Demand is higher than ever for our Know Your Rights programming, which is reaching tens of thousands of people per year. We have integrated Know Your Rights into English for Speakers of Other Languages and Civics classes for adults. We also launched a program called *Guardianes del Barrio* where we are recruiting hundreds of block captains to help educate and mobilize their neighbors. Demand is also at an all-time high for our deportation defense legal services. Our attorneys are working around the clock to get people out of ICE detention. And we're providing urgent community updates as many immigrant New Yorkers face the loss of their health insurance due to federal restrictions.

Make the Road's English and Civics classes support adult immigrants to navigate everyday life and achieve their goals by obtaining better jobs; gaining work

authorization and citizenship; enforcing workplace rights; and helping their children in school. These New Yorkers need the city's support more than ever, especially given the federal administration's attacks and the dramatic cuts it has threatened to funding that the City relies on for adult literacy.

- **We request that the Council renew \$449,637 for Make the Road under the Adult Literacy Forward initiative, expand the initiative to \$18 million AND consolidate all Council Discretionary funding under Adult Literacy Forward.**
- Funds from Adult Literacy Forward enhance our English and Citizenship classes for adults, with integrated Know Your Rights education to empower community members to navigate daily life with confidence and security. Adult Literacy Forward is a nationally recognized, innovative model of funding. Since its inception as a City Council pilot project in FY22, it has consistently demonstrated that greater levels of investment in services, along with greater flexibility to meet community needs, yield greater outcomes and impacts for adult literacy students and their families.
- This is in addition to NYCCAL's call for a new \$20 million adult education funding stream, titled Education for Integration and Equity, to expand access.

Finally, I will highlight a few of Make the Road's other requests for Council support via DYCD for our range of services:

- **An increase to \$300,000 under the Speaker's Initiative** for our wraparound services, including legal, health access, adult education, youth and more.
- **Another \$60,000 under the Speaker's Initiative** for outreach and services for trans and queer Latinx New Yorkers.
- **\$70,000 under Coalition of Theaters of Color** to support Theater for Social Justice, our theater-based social justice leadership program for immigrant youth and youth of color. This includes performance skills workshops, theater-based Know Your Rights programs, and street theater for social justice on issues including immigration and school discipline. This is a

lifeline for youth who are severely impacted by the current attacks on immigrant and queer communities. We are grateful for the Council's support of this program over many years.

Thank you for your support of Make the Road's services in this critical moment.

March 19, 2027

Re: Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing – Committee on Children and Youth

Dear Chair Althea Stevens and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget.

My name is Roman Woodson and I am the Program Director of the New Settlement YouthBuild program. We are a YouthBuild program that proudly sits in your district. As you have been a longtime supporter and already know, we serve young people ages 17 to 24 who are out of school and out of work. We support them in completing their education, obtaining relevant vocational skills and accessing pathways to employment in high-demand sectors.

We are proud members of the NYC YouthBuild Collaborative and write to strongly support the continuation of YouthBuild funding and to urge the Council to:

Restore the NYC YouthBuild Initiative funding to \$2.1 million, consistent with FY23 levels.

It should be noted that each YouthBuild program is a little different in our course offerings. This is in respond to employer demands and student interests. At New Settlement YouthBuild, our program focuses on Construction and Carpentry skills, Digital Literary and Microsoft Office applications, along with Customer Service and Security Guard training. We currently serve 42 young people annually from various neighborhoods including Mount Eden, Highbridge, Morris Heights, the Concourse, Claremont and University Heights, which includes youth from Council Districts 8, 16 and 17.

Our participants face significant barriers, including housing instability, food insecurity, justice system involvement, and limited access to educational opportunities. Despite this, our young people demonstrate resilience and strong commitment to building better futures.

Over the past year, our program has:

- Supported 26 young people in earning their HSE or advancing academically
- Helped participants earn 39 industry-recognized credentials
- Placed 21 graduates into employment, with wages ranging from \$17.00 to \$24.50 per hour.

One of our recent graduates by the name of Christopher, came to YouthBuild after facing significant hardships in his native country. He struggled to find housing and stay connected to school and work. Through YouthBuild, and the council's support, he is now in stable housing, working towards earning his HSE and has already completed his vocational skills training. He is interviewing for a better job and we expect an official offer letter to follow. He is more confidence and capable and his work supports, not just him but his family. By the way, one of his proudest moments at YouthBuild was when he was able to stand with you as you presented a check to support the New Settlement YouthBuild program.

This is the impact of YouthBuild.

Our model is intensive and high-touch, combining education, workforce training, leadership development, and wraparound services. This level of support is essential for young people who have been disconnected from traditional systems.

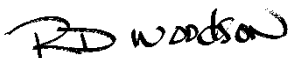
City Council funding allows us to provide stipends, deliver hands-on training, and offer the case management necessary for young people to succeed.

Without restored funding, programs like ours will face difficult decisions about reducing services or limiting enrollment. With it, we can continue to expand access and deepen our impact.

We respectfully urge the Council to restore NYC YouthBuild Initiative funding to \$2.1 million in the FY27 budget.

Thank you for your continued leadership and commitment to New York City's young people.

Respectfully,



Roman Woodson
Program Director
New Settlement YouthBuild
r.woodson@newsettlement.org
Cell: 347-678-1411



**NORTHERN MANHATTAN
IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION
(NMIC)**

TESTIMONY

Regarding

Adult Literacy Forward

SUBMITTED TO:

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

Committee on Children and Youth

March 16, 2026

NMIC is a community-based settlement house founded in 1979 which has grown into a leading multi-service agency with a staff of over 120 employees, serving all of New York City. Our mission is to serve as a catalyst for positive change in the lives of the people in our community on their paths to secure and prosperous futures. We serve about 14,000 clients each year with a variety of programs to address Housing, Immigration, Education/Career, Finance/Benefits, Health, and Holistic needs. Our Adult Education programs provide over 500 members of the community with preparation for the High School Equivalency exam, English language skills, and the associated wrap around services necessary to establish secure and prosperous futures.

The clients we serve are nearly 100% low income, 70% are foreign born, and 58% speak Spanish as their primary language. Our core catchment area is Upper Manhattan (Community Districts 9-12) and adjacent Bronx neighborhoods (Community Districts 1-7). Our communities specifically represent some of the highest socioeconomic need in New York City and include 9 of the top 10 (out of 59 total) community districts with the highest percentage of residents living below the federal poverty level.

NMIC does not charge any fees for services and is one of only a handful of settlement houses to provide a wide array of services onsite. As such we are uniquely positioned to provide clients with both literacy and educational programming, as well as the advocacy and case management support required for their success.

In 2025, NMIC provided education services to over 500 New Yorkers, of who were enrolled in our adult education programs. Of the 103 students enrolled in our Adult Basic Education program, 80% saw improvement on pre-post exams and nine successfully completed their GED. Of the 259 students enrolled in our English for Speakers of other languages classes, nearly half realized a gain of at least one NRS level on pre and post tests.

As participants in these programs, NMIC clients not only received instruction towards their GED or English proficiency, they also received regular case management and wrap around services. Over the course of the year, clients were connected to childcare, employment services, housing supports, public benefits, financial literacy and much more by NMIC case managers.

There are over 2.2 million adults in New York City with limited English language proficiency or who do not have a high school diploma. Yet public funding for adult literacy education is so limited that fewer than 3% of these New Yorkers are able to access adult basic education (ABE), GED, or ESOL classes in any given year. Further, this funding typically does not cover case management services and other supports necessary for programs and their clients to thrive.

Funding from the Adult Literacy Forward Initiative will support nearly 400 additional hours of instruction across NMIC's Adult Education Programs, as well as support a part time intake specialist to guide clients through the enrollment process and conduct required pre testing. Further, it is an essential supplement to NMIC's DYCD contracted literacy programs. DYCD funded programs require, and provide funding to support,

- A part-time Program Assistant with knowledge and experience in intake, data entry, and reporting. The Program Assistant will work a minimum of 19 hours per week.
- A part-time Family Development Coach to provide case management and education/career counseling....will work a minimum of 15 hour a week.

NMIC has two active adult literacy contracts, which under these guidelines, allows for two full-time staff to support all program intake, case management, data entry and reporting. That is simply insufficient to address the over 1500 program applications we receive annually or provide any meaningful case management to our enrolled clients.

While we are proud of our accomplishments, the need in our community remains high. Without the support of Adult Literacy Forward initiative, and most critically the flexibility of the funding, NMIC would not be able adequately respond to client needs before or during classes and operate significantly less effective and successful programs.

New York City relies on over \$24 million in federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act to support adult literacy education in NYC. The Trump administration had called for the complete elimination of this funding in the FY26 federal budget and may do so again in FY27. In the meantime, the Trump administration is seeking to exclude students from federally-funded adult literacy classes based on their immigration status.

Federal dollars currently represent approximately 40% of NMIC's Adult Education funding. Actions by the federal government represent an existential threat to NMIC's ability to continue providing services to both long-time New York residents and more recent immigrants.

To support our ongoing work NMIC requests a renewal in FY27 of our \$240,000 Adult Literacy Forward allocation. We also ask that the City Council consider increasing total Council Discretionary funding for adult literacy education from \$14.5 million to \$18 million and to consolidate the two current Council Discretionary initiatives for adult literacy under Adult Literacy Forward. An increase of \$3.5 million would enable the 63 programs that currently receive funding to serve thousands more adults in need.

Thank you again for your time and support. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the City Council to ensure our communities have access to the resources and supports necessary to meet their academic, personal, and economic goals.

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Dear Council Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on the critical need for continued and enhanced funding for programs that support children and youth across our city.

My name is Samina Ganiyeva and I am a sophomore at New Utrecht high school, and a participant of the Project DOT, Young Women's Initiative cohort.

Project DOT is a youth focused sexual violence prevention and leadership program developed by the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault (The Alliance). The Alliance's mission is to prevent sexual violence and reduce the harm it causes through education, prevention programming, and the pursuit of legal and policy change. Project DOT is a key pillar of this mission and is funded by the city council through the Young Women's Initiative. We are asking for an enhancement from \$100,000 to \$125,000 to expand our program's reach.

Project DOT is designed to address the unique challenges faced by young people from gender, racial, and ethnically marginalized communities in New York City. Launched in 2014 by The Alliance, Project DOT has served as a vital resource for young people who often face systemic barriers to accessing comprehensive sexual violence prevention education and leadership opportunities.

I'm here today advocating on behalf of the Alliance and Project DOT not only as a participant of the program, but as a young person of New York City.

I joined Project DOT this year after first hearing about the program through my school club. I decided to join Project DOT because I care about preventing sexual abuse and assault. Growing up in Kazakhstan, I was often told harmful ideas about relationships as early as elementary school. I remember hearing adults say, "If he beats you, that means he loves you."

Hearing that type of narrative and beliefs from older generations often reinforced harmful stereotypes that blame victims for the abuse that they experience. And silence young people like myself from speaking out against sexual violence.

I joined Project DOT to end that cycle. I want to challenge these harmful ideas and be a part of creating change. So far, the cohort has helped me better understand social identities, inequality, and build sexual violence awareness.

At Project DOT, through culturally responsive programming, I am empowered to take an active role in preventing violence in my life, school, and community while developing leadership skills that prepare me for my future.

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Currently, Project DOT is funded at \$100,000 through the Young Women's Initiative. We are seeking an enhancement of \$125,000 to expand our program's reach and impact. This increase in funding would allow us to:

- Serve more young people across all five boroughs by expanding partnerships with community-based organizations and schools.
- Enhance our curriculum to address emerging needs, including digital safety, healthy relationships, and consent education.
- Provide stipends for youth participants, ensuring accessibility for those who might not otherwise be able to engage in leadership development opportunities.
- Strengthen our mentorship and peer leadership training, equipping young leaders with the tools they need to advocate for themselves and their communities.

The need for programs like Project DOT is urgent. Young people continue to face high rates of sexual violence and harassment. Nationally¹, 1 in 9 girls and 1 in 20 boys will experience sexual violence before the age of 18². 49% of LGBTQ+ youth ages 13-18 report experiencing some form of sexual violence, with rates even higher among Black and Indigenous youth³.

Without adequate funding, prevention programs that center our voices and experiences remain under-resourced, leaving many without the tools they need to protect themselves and their peers. Investing in Project DOT is an investment in the safety, leadership, and future of New York City's youth.

We urge the City Council to prioritize youth-centered violence prevention initiatives by increasing Project DOT's funding to \$125,000. This investment will ensure that more young people—particularly those most at risk—receive the education and support they need to thrive.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to ensuring the well-being and safety of New York City's children and youth.

Sincerely,

Samina Ganiyeva

¹ <https://rainn.org/statistics/children-and-teens>

² <https://rainn.org/statistics/children-and-teens>

³ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/sexual-violence-and-suicide-risk-among-lgbtq-young-people/>

NYC YOUTH JUSTICE COALITION

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL TESTIMONY COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Dr. Megan French0Marcelin

MARCH 16, 2026

Dear Chair Stevens and members of the Children and Youth Committee:

Today I submit testimony on behalf of the New York City Youth Justice Coalition, a network of providers who serve justice-impacted young people through prevention programs, diversion and alternatives to incarceration, and with reentry services.

If we truly believe that young people are our future, then our budget must reflect that belief. Investing in young people means more than responding when something goes wrong—it means creating real opportunities for them to thrive in the communities they call home. It means ensuring that the basic needs many of our young people struggle to meet—housing stability, education support, mentorship, and access to services. And it means building clear pathways to economic mobility for youth in a city that has become unimaginably unaffordable.

Yet, too often in our city, young people only gain access to the services and supports they need only *after* they have already been arrested or are in crisis. Instead of building systems that proactively meet young people where they are, we wait until they have contact with the legal system before mobilizing resources. At that point, service organizations are asked to do the incredibly difficult work of wrapping a young person in supports while also confronting the deeper challenges that may have led to system involvement in the first place—poverty, trauma, unmet educational needs, housing instability, and lack of economic opportunity.

Across New York City, the organizations entrusted with serving young people are asked to meet increasingly complex needs while operating with exceptionally limited resources. City contracts for youth services remain significantly underfunded compared to adult service contracts—contracts that are themselves insufficient—creating persistent challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff and maintaining the continuity of care that young people need to thrive. These constraints are particularly acute as we better understand the profound impacts of mental health challenges and trauma among youth; hiring and retaining clinical professionals capable of responding to these needs requires meaningful and sustained investment.

One of the most effective models for supporting system-impacted youth is to employ credible messengers—individuals with lived experience who can build essential trust and connection with young people—yet current funding structures rarely support them in long-term, sustainable career pathways. As a result, the very people we recognize as indispensable to this work are often unable to remain in it. Together, these structural barriers undermine providers’ ability to deliver consistent, high-quality services and highlight the urgent need for funding models that reflect the true scope and importance of supporting New York City’s young people.

Young people need access to real economic mobility. Paid work experience, connections to continuing education, and pathways into careers are not peripheral supports—they are core prevention strategies. When young people can see a future for themselves, when they can earn income, build skills, and connect to opportunity, they are far less likely to become involved in the justice system in the first place. These investments should be treated as central to youth justice policy, not as an add-on. If we want different outcomes for young people, we must treat youth services as the critical public safety investment they are.

This is why organizations serving justice-involved young people worked together to create the [Landscape of Youth Services for Young People with Juvenile/Criminal Legal Systems Involvement](#), a budget document that helps provide context and recommendations for how scaling should be approached. To scale requires us to invest in the strategies that have proven effective: prevention, credible messaging, and intensive community-based supports. We believe these investments must include:

- Investments in prevention programs that should include peer learning and supports, community in-reach through credible messengers, afterschool programs and drop-in centers, educational supports and more, including but not limited to the proposed increase in COMPASS to \$1.47 billion to meet the needs of the growing census in detention and \$5 million to reignite the NextSTEPS program;
- New investments in the education and programming needs of our young people in detention, inclusive of emerging adults who are now at Rikers.
- Expanded investments in reentry and aftercare for youth and emerging adults, including additional funding to the Community Justice Reentry Network (\$40 million);
- Expanded family court alternative to detention programs to allow young people and emerging adults to be diverted for more serious felonies, including but not limited to gun charges, in every borough (\$30 million);
- Development and promotion of new programs that connect youth to year-round employment opportunities with a meaningful wage, including including \$8,114,227 for the Anti-Gun Violence Employment Program, an increase of \$3.1 million; and,
- Doubled funding (to \$6.89 million) for Council’s Court-Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative, bringing that initiative to new neighborhoods across the City and eliminating waitlists.

If young people are truly our future, then we must invest in them now—by strengthening community-based services, ensuring youth providers are adequately resourced, expanding access to economic opportunity, and building a coordinated system that meets young people where they are.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to New York City’s young people.



March 16, 2027

Re: Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing - Committee on Children and Youth

Testimony of the NYC YouthBuild Collaborative

Submitted by: Robert Taylor

Executive Director, Youth Action YouthBuild, & VP, NYC YB Collaborative

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to Chair Althea Stevens and members of the Committee.

My name is Robert Taylor, and I am here on behalf of the NYC YouthBuild Collaborative, a network of 12 NYC-YouthBuild programs located across the five boroughs serving young people ages 17 to 24 who are out of school and out of work.

We are here today with a clear and urgent request:

Restore NYC YouthBuild Initiative funding to \$2.1 million, consistent with FY24 levels.

This restoration is critical. Since 2023, our collaborative has expanded to include four additional programs, increasing both our reach and our responsibility. At the same time, federal YouthBuild funding has been significantly reduced—dropping from 91 funded programs nationally in 2024 to just 51 in FY26. Local investment is now more important than ever to sustain this work in New York City.

In FY2025 alone, our collaborative served 362 young people across all five boroughs—primarily Black and Latino youth from communities facing the highest levels of economic disconnection.

These young people are navigating real and immediate barriers:

- Over 200 experiencing economic hardship
- More than 100 facing food insecurity
- Dozens involved in the justice system or raising children

And yet—when given the right structure, support, and opportunity—they succeed.

Across our programs:

- 63% of participants completed the program
- 72 young people earned their GED
- 300 industry-recognized credentials were attained
- 123 young people were placed into jobs, with an average starting wage of nearly \$18 per hour

YouthBuild is a high-touch, intensive model, delivering over 40,000 hours of education, 22,000 hours of vocational training, and thousands of hours of case management and mentoring.

The core message we want to leave with you is this:

YouthBuild is one of the City's most effective strategies for re-engaging Opportunity Youth— young people who are too often falling through the cracks but, with the right investment, become workers, students, and leaders in their communities.

Council funding makes this possible. It allows us to:

- Provide stipends and supports that keep young people engaged
- Deliver industry-aligned training in fields like construction, building operations, and other in-demand sectors
- Offer the wraparound services necessary to address real-life barriers

Without restored funding, we risk losing capacity at the very moment when need is increasing.

With it, we can continue to expand opportunity, strengthen communities, and build a more inclusive workforce for New York City.

We respectfully urge the Council to restore NYC YouthBuild Initiative funding to \$2.1 million in the FY27 budget.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the young people of this city.

NYC YouthBuild Program List 2026

Program name	Borough	Contact Name	Title	Email
1. Cypress Hill Development Corporation/YouthBuild Ignite Address: 276 Chestnut St, Brooklyn, NY, United States, 11208	Brooklyn	Peter Rodriguez	Program Director	peterr@cypresshills.org
2. DREAMS YouthBuild Address: 1615 St Johns Pl, Brooklyn, NY 11233	Brooklyn	Sheldon Steel	Program Director	sheldon@twobridges.org
3. Manhattan Educational Opportunity Center YouthBuild. Address: 163 W 125th St 15th floor, New York, NY 10027	Manhattan (West Harlem)	Michael Parker	Program Director	michael.parker@man.eoc.cuny.edu
4. New Settlement Apartments YouthBuild. Address: 1501 Jerome Ave 2nd Fl, Bronx, NY 10452	Bronx	Roman Woodson	Program Director	r.woodson@newsettlement.org
5. New York Center for Interpersonal Development/YouthBuild IMPACT. Address: 330 St. Marks Place Staten Island, NY 10301	Staten Island	Elizabeth Morgan	Director	emorgan@nycid.org
6. New York City Housing Authority YouthBuild. Address: 787 Atlantic Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11238	Brooklyn (Brownsville)	Timi Awonusi	Community Coordinator	Timilehin.Awonusi@nycha.nyc.gov
7. Norther Manhattan Improvement Council YouthBuild. Address: 45 Wadsworth Avenue, NY, NY 10033	Manhattan (Washington Heights)	Micharey Almanzar	Program Director	michareyalmanzar@nmic.org
8. Queens Community House/YouthBuild Queens.	Queens	Fleance Mason	Program Director	FMason@qchnyc.org

Address: 168-46 91 st Avenue, Jamaica, NY 11432				
9. St. Nicks Alliance/ North Brooklyn YouthBuild. Address: 2 Kingsland Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11211	Brooklyn	Aaliyah Dennis	Program Director	adennis@stnicksalliance.org
10. Two Bridges Neighborhood Council YouthBuild. Address: 275 Cherry Street, NY, NY 10002	Manhattan (Lower East Side)	Ditashiah Kohn	President	ditashiah@twobridges.org
11. Volunteers of America – Greater New York YouthBuild . Address: 135 West 50th Street, 9th Floor, New York, NY 10020.	Bronx	Anisee Alves- Willis	Program Director	aalves-willis@voa-gny.org
12. Youth Action Programs and Homes Inc/ Youth Action YouthBuild. Address: 206 East 118 th Street, NY, NY 10035	Manhattan (East & Central Harlem, S. Bronx)	Daniel Garcia	Director of Programs	dgarcia@yayb.org
13. YouthBuild Long Island	Long Island	Jenette Adams, LMSW	Director	JAdams@unitedwayli.org

New York City YouthBuild Program Contact List 2026

New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents

**Testimony before the Committee on Children and Youth
Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 16, 2026**

**Presented by
Allison Hollihan, Director
New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents
The Osborne Association**



New York Initiative for
Children of Incarcerated Parents

A project of Osborne Association

I am Allison Hollihan, the Director for the New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents (NYCIP), a statewide partnership of over 50 government agencies, community- and faith-based organizations, and families who have experienced parental incarceration. Osborne has coordinated this partnership for the past 20 years, filling a need to bring diverse stakeholders together to promote the well-being of children affected by their parent’s criminal legal system involvement.

As you may know, Osborne is one of the oldest and largest service providers in New York State assisting individuals and their families in navigating arrest, courts, pre-trial detention on Rikers, incarceration in state prisons, parole, and reentry. We serve 18,000 people each year. Through advocacy, direct service, and policy reform, Osborne works to create opportunities for people to heal, grow, and thrive. We are grateful for the Council’s ongoing support and look forward to continued collaboration.

I am here on behalf of the NY Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents (NYCIP) to highlight the need and the opportunities for City agencies to better support the one in 14 children who have experienced the incarceration of a parent. In 2021, **approximately one in five NYC DOE high school students reported experiencing parental incarceration on the DOHMH Youth Risk Behavior Survey.**¹ Due to the systemic racism in the criminal legal system, children of color experience parental incarceration at higher rates: 1 in 4 Black children and 1 in 10 Hispanic children, compared to 1 in 25 white children.² These numbers call for a coordinated, thoughtful response by City agencies and service providers to meet the specific needs that parental incarceration can create.

Parental incarceration is an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), one of ten childhood traumas that are linked to toxic stress, altered brain development, and long-term negative health and mental health outcomes. Children who experience the arrest and incarceration of a loved one are also more likely than other children to experience violence in their communities and at home.³ Thus, it is imperative that the City take steps to promote protective factors to support children’s well-being, including cross-systems collaboration, data collection, outcomes analysis with a racial equity lens, and dedicated funding for supportive services.

NYCIP issued reports in 2010⁴ and 2016⁵ that examined the needs and experiences of children with incarcerated parents in New York and put forth recommendations that were informed by young people. While some of these recommendations have since been implemented, those that have not remain relevant and I will highlight a few key recommendations today.

¹ New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. EpiQuery - Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2021.

² Wildeman C. Parental Imprisonment, the Prison Boom, and the Concentration of Childhood Disadvantage. Demography. 2009 May.

³ In an analysis of the 2016 National Survey of Children’s Health data, 20.3% of children of incarcerated parents experienced community violence, compared to 2.3% of children who had never experienced parental incarceration.

⁴ <https://www.osborneny.org/assets/files/ACalltoActionNYCIP.Osborne2011.pdf>

⁵ https://www.osborneny.org/assets/files/NYCIP_Supporting_CIPs_in_Child_Welfare_2016.pdf

1. Safeguarding children when a parent is arrested.

Osborne is grateful to have received City Council funding for the past five years to implement Administrative Code §14-181, which requires NYPD to be trained on how to safeguard children present during an arrest and offer families information about community-based services that can help children process the arrest of a parent. With this funding, we have trained over 9,000 NYPD officers and 11 community-based organizations, as well as the Brooklyn and Manhattan District Attorney's offices. However, the majority of the approximately 35,000 uniformed members of service have not received comprehensive training and a sustainable training plan has yet to be implemented. We request discretionary funding in FY27 to continue training NYPD officers, assist NYPD with implementing a sustainable training plan, and expand this work to train NYC Department of Correction (DOC) personnel to improve interactions with children who visit Rikers and safeguard them when their parent/caregiver is arrested while visiting Rikers. Further, we implore NYPD to go beyond the law and develop a process for considering and safeguarding children when planning for and executing warrants (a traumatizing experience for a child).

Osborne has urged NYPD to strengthen its data collection efforts about children present during a parent or caregiver's arrest. Knowing the number of children present and their ages would ensure adequate and targeted community-based resources are available. We have been informed by the NYPD that the data they collect has to be mandated by law, and **we urge the Council to introduce a bill requiring the NYPD to collect this data.**

2. Funding community-based organizations to provide tailored services to support children of arrested and incarcerated parents.

Through the aforementioned funding from the City Council, Osborne provided technical assistance and training for 11 community-based organizations that provide critical mental health services to NYC's children and families. It is critical to expand this network of providers and dedicate City funding to support ongoing training for clinicians and social workers to meet the unique needs of children affected by a parent's arrest and incarceration. This should include, but not be limited to, dedicated funding for afterschool programs, Beacon and Cornerstone Community Centers, Runaway and Homeless Youth services, Youth Workforce Development programs, Fatherhood programs, Family Support programs, Immigrant Services, and Youth Workforce Development programs, including the Summer Youth Employment Program, to serve children of incarcerated parents.

3. Supporting children's relationships with parents incarcerated on Rikers Island.

Most children want and need to visit their incarcerated parents to hold important conversations that support children's wellbeing and reduce the trauma of separation. We applaud the City

Council for passing a package of Rikers visiting bills on March 11, 2025, to improve visiting procedures and transparency in New York City jails. Local Law 40 adds a “Child Visitor Program” to the Administrative Code (§9-168) to ensure that children have child-friendly visiting spaces and access to age-appropriate materials such as toys and books while visiting a parent or loved one on Rikers, and requires DOC to reduce wait times for children. There remains a lot to do within DOC for the visiting process to be child-friendly and we urge the Council to monitor implementation and ask for this Committee to partner with the Criminal Justice Committee to ensure children's needs are considered and addressed. DOC now offers a short annual training (to which Osborne contributed) to address and strengthen skills in communicating with children to promote positive visiting experiences and minimize trauma. This training should be offered throughout the year and be expanded to include an in-service, refresher course.

In accordance with Local Law 40, DOC is instructed to report on the previous year’s number of child visitors and the average time a child visitor spends waiting to see their incarcerated loved one by April 1 of this year. We urge the Council to ensure this deadline is adhered to, and to analyze the data to confirm that the intent of the law is being met.

Local Law 40 also requires DOC to conduct a feasibility study to determine whether televisits (video visiting) can be offered on weekends without reducing in-person visiting hours. Currently, televisits are only offered on Fridays from 8:30 am to 1:00 pm, which are not accessible for children because these hours conflict with school. We urge DOC to offer televisits every day, including weekend and evening hours so that children and families do not have to miss school and work to televisit.

To improve the experience of all visitors, including children, to Rikers Island, it is critical for these laws to be implemented with input from visitors and community-based organizations with experience serving children and families visiting Rikers. We thank the City Council for issuing the first ever report on visiting Rikers Island last December, and holding a hearing dedicated to this issue. At this hearing, DOC announced they would create a new position within the department, and they have since hired an Executive Director of Visit Operations. We applaud this and welcome opportunities to collaborate with the Executive Director.

Osborne has decades of experience in child-friendly visiting practices and was a key member of the Rikers Visiting Workgroup, which met from 2015 to 2021. This workgroup included uniformed and administrative staff of DOC as well as community members and providers, and accomplished numerous concrete improvements, including having visit greeters at Rikers. It is encouraging news that DOC announced last week that they will be reconvening this workgroup. This workgroup can build on the work that has been done, and identify and resolve the many pressing issues families and incarcerated people experience when visiting Rikers. Among the first items the workgroup can focus on is the implementation of the three visiting laws and improving the experience of the thousands of children who visit Rikers every year.

Lastly, the ACS Children of Incarcerated Parents Program (CHIPP) facilitates visits for children with an open ACS case and their incarcerated parents, which is critical for families working towards reunification or another permanency goal. However, post-COVID, Rikers only allows the ACS CHIPP program to bring children to Rikers on Tuesdays, a school day, and we urge DOC to reinstate Saturday visits for the CHIPP program.

4. Stopping the surveillance of children speaking with their parents who are incarcerated on Rikers.

DOC contracts with Securus Technologies, which uses its access to recorded telephone calls to administer “a vast and interconnected mass surveillance system that collects and databases biometric and other personal data not only from those detained in our city jails, but also their families, communities, and advocates.”⁶ All the data that DOC and Securus collect from both people in custody and family and community members they speak to is uploaded to a database, access to which is sold to by Securus’s law enforcement customers nationwide.⁷

This sensitive data is used to map and track familial, associational, and even political ties in violation of the fundamental constitutional rights of both people in custody and community members, who are subject to this invasive surveillance solely because their loved one cannot afford to pay bail.

The only way to be sure the data will not be misused and the rights of New Yorkers—including children—violated is to ensure it is not collected in the first place. **We ask for City Council to pass the The End Correctional Community Surveillance (“ECCoS”) Act (Int. 0096-2026)** to protect children of incarcerated parents from being swept up in this massive surveillance system and potentially criminalized for simply communicating with their parents incarcerated on Rikers.

5. Sensitively collecting data on how many children experience the arrest or incarceration of a parent is needed to inform service delivery, resource allocation, and cross-systems collaboration.

It is long past time to address the fact that we do not know how many children in New York City are present at a parent’s arrest or experience the incarceration of a parent. Having this data would allow for cross-systems collaboration and coordination with criminal justice agencies, and support the need for staff training and tailoring best practices and resource allocation to this

⁶ See Testimony of Alyssa Briody, on behalf of Brooklyn Defender Services, before the New York City Council Committees on Contract and Criminal Justice on “Oversight – Contracted Jail Services.” Jan. 28, 2025, <https://bds.org/assets/images/BDS-Contracts-and-Crim-Justice-Hearing-Contracted-Jail-Services-Jan-28-2025.pdf>.

⁷ Id., citing CISION PR NEWSWIRE, Securus Delivers the Most Advanced "Big Data" Analytical Tool in Corrections (Dec. 21, 2015), <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/securus-delivers-the-most-advanced-big-data-analytical-tool-in-corrections-300195882.html>.

particular circumstance. Taking steps to identify this experience and scaffold support for children promotes child and family well-being, setting children up for success rather than costly involvement in the mental health, child welfare, shelter, or criminal legal systems.

The little data that we do have is collected by the NYC Criminal Justice Agency (CJA) during pre-arraignment interviews. During 2023 and 2024, CJA reported that **41,329** people told CJA's pretrial associates that they provided full-time care to children under 18 years of age, and **64,863** people reported that they provided financial support to children. The data reveals that Brooklyn has the highest numbers of people (**30,910**) reporting that they provide financial support to children, with **21,418** stating that they are primary caregivers of children.

Despite decades of providers and advocates calling for data, we still do not know how many children in foster care have an incarcerated parent, which could result in the foster care provider agency not meeting their legally mandated reasonable and diligent efforts. It is essential that ACS provider agencies determine and document whether a parent is incarcerated, and if so, take steps to engage the parent, guided by what is in the child's best interest and the law that requires reasonable efforts, including in-person visits. Knowing that a parent is incarcerated allows for service providers to better support children's relationships with their parents, provide children with services to process this unique form of loss, and promote positive outcomes for children. Within child welfare, some policies do exist to uphold the rights and meet the needs of these children, but data collection mechanisms are needed to monitor compliance with existing policies and to track outcomes.

We applaud the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and the DOE for including parental incarceration in the NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey beginning in 2017. **This data tells us that in 2021, 43,000 (22%) high school students reported experiencing the incarceration of a parent or caregiver.** We urge DOHMH to resume collecting data on middle school students (last collected in 2017) and community-level data to better equip professionals to address challenges students are facing that may contribute to disparate outcomes

6. We recommend that ACS and its provider agencies take steps to better support children of arrested and incarcerated parents in preventive and foster care programs. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- ▶ Strengthen the ability of automated, integrated, secure information systems to capture and aggregate data about parental incarceration. Implement internal identification and tracking mechanisms.
- ▶ Note parental incarceration in family and child service plans.
- ▶ Monitor and document compliance with policies and practices regarding children of incarcerated parents in provider agency performance reviews and corrective action plans.

- ▶ Deliver ongoing staff training about practices that support children of incarcerated parents and an overview of the criminal legal system.
- ▶ Designate provider agency point persons who have expertise working with incarcerated parents and navigating the criminal legal system.

7. Children of incarcerated parents should be considered as a priority population for the Summer Youth Employment Program.

National research and data collected by the NYC DOHMH⁸ finds that parental incarceration is associated with lower school readiness, increased instability, poor mental health outcomes, and higher rates of tobacco and drug use. Families of the incarcerated are also more likely to experience poverty, with nearly 65% of families with an incarcerated member unable to meet their family's basic needs.⁹ Ensuring that children of incarcerated parents are prioritized for SYEP will mean they have opportunities to build their career readiness skills and earn income to meet their basic needs.

Current SYEP priority populations include young people in foster care, experiencing homelessness/housing instability, involved in the justice system, or receiving preventive services.

8. The Interagency Coordinating Council on Youth (ICC) should create a working group focused on youth with incarcerated parents to improve the effectiveness of all youth-serving agencies to better understand and meet their unique needs..

Currently, the ICC has two working groups focusing on court-involved youth and young people who identify as LGBTQ. It is equally imperative that the needs of the one in 14 young people with incarcerated parents are considered and recognized by every City agency that serves children and families, and those that arrest, detain, prosecute, sentence, and supervise parents. Too often, these children are not considered during policy development or program design and implementation, and the workforce is ill-equipped to meet their needs. The recommended working group should inventory City agencies' existing policies and practices, and revise or create policies to safeguard children consistent with the *Children of Incarcerated Parents' Bill of Rights*.¹⁰ The group should explore how best to equip the workforce with language and strategies for creating affirming spaces that make families comfortable to disclose that they are navigating a parent's involvement in the criminal legal system from the point of a parent's arrest through reentry. NYCIP welcomes the opportunity to present on this issue at an upcoming ICC meeting.

⁸ Khan S, Baquero M, Davila, M. Parental Incarceration and Well-Being among Adolescents in New York City Public High Schools. NYC Vital Signs, 2021, 19(3); 1-4.

⁹ *Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families*. Oakland, CA: Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, Research Action Design, 2015.

¹⁰ The Bill of Rights outlines eight rights that are vital to young people with incarcerated parents.

https://www.osborneny.org/assets/files/SUSU_2021_Bill_of_Rights_Letter_Final.pdf

Please note that the New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents issues monthly email updates and convenes quarterly. We welcome Councilmembers and your staff to attend. Please contact me at ahollihan@osborneny.org for details.

Attached to this testimony are the Osborne Association's discretionary funding requests related to supporting NYC's children and families.

Thank you.

**The Osborne Association
New York City Council
FY27 Discretionary Funding Requests Related to Children & Families**

Program	Description	FY27 Request	FY26 Funding
Safeguarding Children Initiative (Ref: 2239478)	<p>To support the implementation of Local Law 1349-A, enacted to reduce trauma to children when NYPD arrests parents/ caregivers. Osborne will provide necessary training and collaborate with NYPD on numerous aspects of implementation, and engage and train a network of CBOs that can provide post-arrest support to children. Expanded funding also allows for safeguarding children's work with NYC DOC.</p>	\$500,000	\$265,000
Improving Behavioral Health and Wellbeing for Youth (Ref: 2192640)	<p>For assessing and addressing mental health and trauma in youth impacted by the criminal legal system through treatment options that alleviate stress, improve functioning, and reduce trauma symptoms. Targets: 70 assessments; 60 referrals.</p>	\$308,000	\$158,000
Alternatives to Incarceration (Ref: 2155808)	<p>Osborne’s portion of the ATI & Reentry Coalition request, which will support multiple programs: (1) court advocacy and mitigation services; (2) video visiting and family strengthening activities; (3) expansion of job training and placement; (4) elder reentry services; and (5) the Osborne Center for Justice Across Generations.</p>	\$2,152,074	\$1,952,074
Bronx-Osborne Gun Accountability Project - BOGAP (Ref: 2242267)	<p>To support BOGAP—an innovative diversion program for young adults developed with the Bronx DA. Funds will be used to provide hot meals to program participants, stipends for internships, and additional support services to participants to increase their chances of success in the program.</p>	\$25,000	\$20,000

From: [Swannie Batista](#)
To: [NYC Council Hearings](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Written Testimony of Swannie Batista
Date: Monday, March 16, 2026 9:02:09 PM

[REDACTED]

Good afternoon Chair and distinguished members of the Youth and Children Committee.

My name is **Swannie Batista**, and I serve as the President of Paralegals FTC and as a community leader working closely with residents and youth throughout the Bronx. I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony regarding the challenges facing young people in District 16 and across our borough.

For many of our youth—particularly those from **Black and Brown communities**—the pathways toward opportunity, civic engagement, and professional development remain limited. At the same time, the relationship between our young people and law enforcement institutions is strained or nonexistent. These two realities intersect in ways that place many of our youth at a disadvantage long before they ever enter adulthood.

Across District 16 and throughout the Bronx, we are witnessing the consequences of systemic gaps. Young people often lack exposure to career pathways within the legal system, government, and civic leadership. Many have never met a lawyer, a judge, a paralegal, a policy advisor, or a community board member who looks like them or comes from a similar background. Without these role models and opportunities, the legal and civic systems appear distant, inaccessible, or adversarial.

As a result, many youth grow up seeing the justice system only through negative interactions rather than as a space where they can build careers, advocate for their communities, or create meaningful change.

Programs that introduce youth to careers in **law, public service, policy, and community advocacy** can transform this narrative. By connecting youth with paralegals, attorneys, civic leaders, and public officials, we can create tangible pathways that show them what is possible. These initiatives

not only provide professional exposure but also cultivate **critical thinking, civic awareness, and leadership skills** that empower young people to become constructive participants in their communities.

Critical thinking and civic education programs are particularly essential. Our youth deserve access to initiatives that teach them how systems work, how laws affect their daily lives, and how they can use their voices to influence policies that shape their futures. When young people understand the structures around them, they are more likely to engage constructively rather than feel alienated from those institutions.

At present, too many of our young people are weighed down by systemic barriers—poverty, limited mentorship, under-resourced schools, and a lack of structured opportunities. Without intervention, these conditions contribute to cycles in which youth become entangled in a system that too often leads them toward incarceration rather than empowerment.

This is not simply a youth issue; it is a **collective community responsibility**. Families, community organizations, educators, legal professionals, policymakers, and government agencies must work together to build the infrastructure that our youth need.

Programs that connect youth with **legal education, mentorship from paralegals and attorneys, exposure to government processes, and training in advocacy and critical thinking** make sense for several reasons:

First, they **build trust between young people and institutions** that have historically been disconnected from their communities.

Second, they **create career pipelines** that allow youth to envision themselves as professionals within the legal, civic, and policy sectors.

Third, they **prevent involvement with the criminal justice system** by providing constructive alternatives, mentorship, and guidance.

Fourth, they **strengthen communities** by cultivating future leaders who are informed, engaged, and invested in improving their neighborhoods.

When young people see pathways toward opportunity, they are more likely to pursue education, civic engagement, and leadership roles rather than feel pushed toward systems that punish rather than uplift.

District 16 and the broader Bronx deserve sustained investments in programs that center youth empowerment, particularly for Black and Brown communities that have historically been underserved. Initiatives that combine mentorship, legal education, civic engagement, and career exploration can change trajectories not only for individuals but for entire neighborhoods.

Our youth are not the problem—they are our **greatest asset**. When we invest in their potential, we invest in the future stability, safety, and prosperity of our communities.

I urge the Committee to continue supporting and expanding initiatives that build bridges between youth, community leaders, and the institutions that shape our society. Together, we can ensure that the next generation has the tools, knowledge, and opportunities necessary to thrive.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to the youth of the Bronx.

Respectfully submitted,

Swannie Batista

President, Paralegals FTC

FY27 City Council Budget Hearings
March 16, 2026 at 9:30am
Committee on Children and Youth

Thank you, Chair Stevens, and the Committee on Children and Youth, for holding this hearing and giving us an opportunity to testify. My name is Stephanie Skaff and I am the Executive Director of play:groundNYC, an organization dedicated to transforming the city through play. We support children's self-directed play at our adventure playground, The Yard, located on Governors Island, and through school- and community-based programs in neighborhoods throughout the city.

We are here today because children's play is central to a good childhood, and we believe that opportunities for self-directed play, where children guide their own experiences and make their own choices, are too few in our city. Public schools are often lacking in open space for play, making recess unavailable or unrealistic for many children. Traffic has made neighborhood play too dangerous. Traditional playgrounds and open space are plentiful in some neighborhoods and non-existent in others. The culture around childhood emphasizes achievement and structured activities, leading children to be overextended, stressed and less social. Children's mental health is affected by the lack of opportunities to slow down and play freely.

We believe—and we see it first hand through our programs at The Yard and in the public school system—that when children have the opportunity to play freely, with minimal adult intervention, they have joyful, imaginative, surprising and challenging experiences that shape how they learn, how they feel about themselves, and how they socialize with others. Parents and caregivers bring their children to The Yard because of how unusual and transformative it is. Educators bring their students for field trips, and come to us for professional development in order to learn how to build more free play into the school environment.

As an organization, we are trying to ensure that children's play is treated as a right rather than a privilege. As an uncompromising and essential aspect of a healthy childhood. The Committee on Children and Youth could support this work by advocating for improvements in recess environments for public school children, encouraging school yards to remain open to the public in the evenings and on weekends, supporting open streets as a way for children to play safely in their neighborhoods, and investing in resources that educate the public about play and provide play opportunities for children. Together, we could give New York City's children opportunities for amazing play everyday.

At play:groundNYC, we thank you for allowing us to testify about this important subject that is very dear to us, and brings us joy. We hope to find a way to work with the Committee on Children and Youth to improve play for all children in all neighborhoods throughout NYC.



Testimony to the NYC Council Committee on Children and Youth
Re: Restore NYC YouthBuild Initiative Funding to \$2.1 Million (FY24 Level)

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee on Children and Youth,

My name is Saida Mitchell, and I serve as Career Services Director of Youth Workforce at Queens Community House (QCH). QCH operates a YouthBuild program serving young adults across Southeast and Central Queens, including neighborhoods such as Richmond Hill, South Ozone Park, Jamaica, Jamaica South, Rochdale Village, Flushing, and surrounding communities (ZIP codes: 11416, 11417, 11418, 11419, 11420, 11432, 11433, 11434, 11435, 11436, 11367, and 11355).

Our YouthBuild program serves young people ages 16–24 who are disconnected from school and work, many of whom face barriers such as housing instability, justice involvement, and limited access to economic opportunity. Through an integrated model of education, workforce training, and leadership development, we support participants in building pathways toward long-term stability and self-sufficiency.

Our program focuses on:

- GED preparation and attainment
- Industry-recognized training in construction and career pathway development
- Paid work-based learning opportunities
- Job placement into unsubsidized employment
- Ongoing case management and wraparound supports

In the past year, our program has achieved the following outcomes:

- **26 participants earned their GED or made measurable progress toward completion**

- **41 participants completed industry-recognized contraction training**
- **29 participants obtained industry-recognized credentials**
- **29 participants were placed into employment or advanced training opportunities**

Participant Impact:

One YP participant, Amir H. began in your youth build as a part of our training cohort that featured and IT training component. Through his dedication and the support of our program, he developed strong technical and professional skills. Amir has since been hired full-time as an IT Specialist at the Forest Hills Community Center, where he continues to apply what he learned and contribute meaningfully to his workplace. His journey reflects the impact of YouthBuild in connecting young people to sustainable career pathways and long-term growth opportunities.

Despite these strong outcomes, our work is at risk. Federal YouthBuild funding has been significantly reduced, while the need for these services continues to grow. Programs like ours are serving more young people with increasingly complex needs, making local funding support more critical than ever.

We respectfully urge the Council to **restore funding for the NYC YouthBuild Initiative to \$2.1 million**, maintaining the FY24 level. This investment is essential to sustaining program services, supporting young people across New York City, and ensuring continued pathways to education and employment.

Thank you for your continued commitment to New York City's young people.

Sincerely,
Saida Mitchell
Career Services Director
Queens Community House

Written Testimony in Support of \$10 Million for City's First Readers

Chair and Members of the New York City Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of a **\$10 million investment in City's First Readers**, the City's only public, citywide early literacy initiative. This funding is essential to ensuring that New York City's youngest children, particularly those growing up in under-resourced communities, enter school ready to learn, thrive, and succeed.

City's First Readers (CFR) is a powerful example of what New York City does best: leveraging collaboration across systems to create equity and deliver results. Since its creation by the City Council in 2014, CFR has served as the backbone of the City's early literacy ecosystem, aligning families, childcare providers, libraries, healthcare systems, and community-based organizations across all 51 Council districts. Using the Science of Reading as its foundation, CFR ensures that children from birth through age five build the language, vocabulary, and early literacy skills that are essential for long-term academic success.

CFR's mission is clear and urgent: **using the power of early literacy and the strength of collaboration to create equity for children in every New York City neighborhood**. Together, CFR partners ensure that children from all backgrounds have a strong foundation to start school successfully and succeed beyond their school years.

Reach Out and Read: Leveraging Healthcare to Advance Early Literacy

Reach Out and Read of Greater New York is proud to be a core partner in the City's First Readers coalition. Reach Out and Read integrates early literacy into pediatric healthcare by providing developmentally appropriate books and guidance to families during well-child visits from birth through age five. By embedding literacy support into routine medical care, Reach Out and Read reaches families where they already are and help build that trust and value guidance from healthcare providers.

In New York City, Reach Out and Read serves over 200,000 children annually across clinics in every borough, with a particular focus on underserved clinics. Pediatricians and healthcare providers are uniquely positioned to reinforce the message that reading aloud and talking with young children from birth is not just educational, it is essential to healthy brain development.

Decades of research show that children who participate in Reach Out and Read demonstrate stronger vocabulary development, improved language skills, and more frequent reading at home. These outcomes directly support the City's goals around kindergarten readiness, literacy achievement, and long-term educational equity. Through CFR, Reach Out and Read is able to align its healthcare-based approach with complementary literacy supports in childcare programs, libraries, and community settings, creating a seamless, citywide web of support for families with young children.

Why Increased Investment Is Needed Now

City's First Readers has demonstrated measurable, citywide impact. In the past year alone, CFR partners generated more than **one million family literacy touchpoints**, distributed over **400,000 books and literacy kits**, issued **30,000 library cards** to children ages 0–5, trained more than **1,100 early educators**, and operated across **587 locations**, including **155 library branches**. Families engaged with CFR read more frequently with their children, have more books in their homes, and use evidence-based practices that support how young children learn.

Yet despite rising costs, inflation, and increased demand, particularly from newly arrived immigrant families, CFR funding has remained flat for several years. This has strained partner organizations at the very moment

when the City is making historic investments in Universal Childcare and 2-Care. Access to childcare alone is not enough. Without intentional investment in early language and literacy, the promise of these systems will not be fully realized.

An increase to **\$10 million** will allow City's First Readers to:

- Embed evidence-based early literacy into Universal Childcare and 2-Care settings
- Strengthen and retain a skilled early literacy workforce aligned with NYC Reads
- Leverage healthcare systems to reach families with young children through trusted providers
- Expand culturally responsive, multilingual services for immigrant, migrant, and refugee families
- Increase access to books and educational materials in multiple languages
- Strengthen shared data, technology, and outreach systems
- Expand CFR's presence in neighborhoods with the highest indicators of need

Expansion is not simply about doing more, it requires stronger infrastructure, deeper coordination, and robust evaluation to ensure quality and equity at scale. This is especially true for collective impact initiatives like CFR, where success depends on alignment across multiple independent organizations and systems.

A Smart, Preventive Investment

The achievement gap begins as an opportunity gap. Investing in early literacy is one of the most effective and cost-efficient strategies to improve educational outcomes and reduce the need for later intervention. City data show that children who receive early language support and transition out of English Language Learner services by third grade are among the highest-performing students citywide. Supporting children before they enter kindergarten strengthens long-term outcomes for students, families, and schools and maximizes the return on public investment.

City's First Readers is prevention at its best: evidence-based, equity-driven, and deeply embedded in the communities it serves. Reach Out and Read and our fellow CFR partners stand ready to scale our impact, reach more families, and ensure that every child in New York City has the foundation they need to thrive.

On behalf of Reach Out and Read of Greater New York and the City's First Readers coalition, I respectfully urge the New York City Council to support a **\$10 million allocation for City's First Readers** in the upcoming budget. This investment will help ensure that New York City's youngest learners are not only cared for but truly prepared to succeed.

Thank you for your leadership and continued commitment to New York City's children and families.

Respectfully submitted,

Kari Kurjiaka

she/her/hers

Director of Literacy & Public Policy

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GREATER NEW YORK

March 16, 2026

New York City Council

Committee on Children and Youth
Hon. Althea Stevens, Chair

**Testimony of Sebastien Vante, Associate Vice President
Streetwork Project, Safe Horizon**

On the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Sebastien Vante, and I am Associate Vice President of Streetwork Project at Safe Horizon, the nation's largest non-profit victim assistance organization. Every year, 250,000 people seek safety through our services. Our mission is to stand with those who have experienced violence, abuse, and exploitation. We offer unwavering support and advocate for systemic change. We envision a world where safety is a universal human right.

Whether we are called on to provide expert testimony at an oversight hearing or to assist a constituent in crisis and in need of emergency services, we are proud to partner with the City Council in a collective effort to make our city safer for all. We are here to help you and your staff learn how best to support survivors and connect them to the resources available in your borough and community.

Over many years, the City Council has been a key supporter of our programs helping adult, adolescent, and child victims of violence and abuse. City Council funding fills in gaps where no other financial support exists and allows us to draw down critical dollars from other sources. Moreover, this funding demonstrates the value that you and your colleagues place in helping survivors of all ages access desperately needed shelter, legal assistance, counseling, and wraparound services and supports.

The City Council has also championed the human services nonprofit sector. Our sector desperately needs your continued help to ensure that human services workers across our sector receive the compensation and support we need. To be frank – our sector continues to operate in a perpetual state of crisis. Nonprofit human services organizations are suffering as a result of delayed contracts and payments – preventable and solvable problems.

Initiative and Discretionary Funding

Citywide Initiative funding contracted through the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) supports the following Safe Horizon programs:

Child Advocacy Centers (CACs)

Safe Horizon's Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) are at the heart of New York City's response to child abuse. At our CACs, child victims of sexual and/or severe physical abuse receive the help they need quickly and in one location. The police, prosecutors, medical professionals, victim advocates, clinicians, and child protective caseworkers work together under one roof in a child-friendly environment that minimizes trauma and facilitates healing. This allows us to facilitate a swift, comprehensive, coordinated investigation and multi-disciplinary team response that significantly reduces the number of times children must disclose details of their abuse. This coordinated, trauma-informed response to abuse helps to prevent the re-traumatization of the child during each re-telling of the violence that took place. We can connect children and their families to the mental healthcare and services they need to heal.

Prior to the creation of the CAC model, child victims would be asked to repeat their story over and over and relive their trauma and pain. Many child victims were left feeling as if no one believed them and felt to blame for causing disruption to their families. And many would recant their story. This method of investigating incidents of abuse was traumatizing, stigmatizing, and unjust. The CAC model is a gamechanger and the gold standard for investigating reports of child abuse. We are grateful for the Council's continued financial support through the **Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault**, contracted through ACS.

In FY25, our CACs provided services to over 8,521 children and 3,550 caregivers throughout the five boroughs. We are requesting **a restoration and an enhancement to \$1,000,000** in FY27 to sustain general operations in our CACs across the five boroughs. This will allow the CACs to continue to provide healing and support to child victims and their families. Additionally, we are seeking for this core funding to be **baselined** to ensure the City's continued investment in the CAC model.

Streetwork Project

Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project provides shelter, showers, hot meals, therapy, service linkage, safer sex supports, case management, and so much more, in a therapeutic harm reduction community serving homeless youth ages 13 to 25. We work with homeless and street-involved young people to help them find safety and stability. Many homeless young people face a day-to-day struggle to survive, which can lead to physical and emotional harm. Homeless youth may have experienced family abuse, violence, rejection, and instability that led to their homelessness. We welcome these young people, help them navigate complex systems, connect them to community, and provide essential resources at our drop-in centers, at our overnight shelter, and through our street outreach teams. Streetwork has been doing this community-based work since 1984, and we will continue to do so for as long as our services are needed. Over the past several years, Streetwork has experienced an increase in the number of migrant young people seeking help who have nowhere else to go.

In FY25, Streetwork Project provided services to 1,139 clients across our drop-in centers and overnight shelter, while our overnight street outreach team engaged in 15,277 contacts with homeless and at-risk young people. The City Council currently supports Streetwork through the **Supports for Persons Involved in the Sex Trade Initiative** (contracted through DYCD), **LGBTQIA+ Youth Support and Services** (contracted through DYCD), the **Viral Hepatitis Prevention Initiative** (contracted through DOHMH), and a **Speaker's Initiative** (contracted through DYCD).

The **Support for Persons Involved in the Sex Trade Initiative** bolsters Streetwork's ability to provide services and access to housing to young people engaged in the sex trade. With this funding, we have been able to increase our engagement and response to the number of young people both in the drop-in center and on the streets who are in crisis and involved in the sex trade and to connect them to supportive counseling, access to benefits and housing, and primary and mental healthcare. Safe Horizon is seeking a **restoration and enhancement to \$500,000** to continue to bolster our response and offer critical services to this vulnerable population navigating homelessness, violence, racism, and so many other traumas.

LGBTQIA+ Youth Support and Services supports Streetwork's work addressing the needs of LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults, including navigating housing options and accessing long term safety. **We are seeking a restoration of \$455,000.**

The **Viral Hepatitis Prevention Initiative** helps Streetwork increase our capacity to connect potentially Hepatitis C-affected clients to testing, medical care, treatment, and infection control services. We are seeking a **restoration and enhancement to \$50,000** - so we can link runaway and homeless youth to the medical supports they need and deserve.

The **Speaker's Initiative** enhances Streetwork's ability to address the complex immigration and social services needs of undocumented and noncitizen young people seeking out support and assistance when they have nowhere else to turn. Streetwork has experienced an increase in the number of undocumented and migrant young people seeking our support and our assistance. We believe that when young people are connected to legal assistance, long-term representation, and wraparound services, we help to prevent them from experiencing further exploitation, trafficking, and violence. **We are seeking a restoration of \$250,000.**

Immigration Law Project

Safe Horizon's Immigration Law Project (ILP) provides expert legal advice and representation to victims of crime, violence, abuse, trafficking, and torture. ILP staff help guide their clients through complex immigration proceedings and assist them in VAWA self-petitions, petitions for U nonimmigrant status and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), applications for asylum, adjustment of status and citizenship, as well as in removal defense. ILP receives referrals internally from Safe Horizon's other programs, as well as externally from the immigration courts, law enforcement agencies, other community-based organizations, legislators, and from former and current clients. ILP strives to provide the highest quality services to a very vulnerable population. Clients live in all five boroughs and experience a multitude of victimizations including domestic

violence, sexual assault, and other crimes. As a result of the settling of recent arrivals in New York City and the anti-immigrant policies emanating from Washington, Safe Horizon's ILP has seen an increase of survivors seeking our immediate assistance. In addition, overwhelmed government systems have left countless in tenuous circumstances—food and housing insecure and desperate for work—making them even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation and in need of our support and services.

The Adams Administration prioritized assisting migrants with completing asylum applications, not comprehensive legal screenings and long-term representation and assistance. We were grateful to see that the Council invested heavily in nonprofit civil legal assistance in the FY26 budget, and we urge the Council to continue to do so this year.

In FY25, ILP provided full representation, advice, and consults to nearly 600 clients and provided over 5,100 telephonic information and referral services. The City Council supports ILP through **Immigration Legal Services for Survivors of Violence & Gender Based Harm** (contracted through DSS/HRA), the **Culturally Specific Gender Based Violence Initiative** (contracted through DYCD), the **Protect NYC Families Initiative** (contracted through DSS/HRA), and the **Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI)** (contracted through DSS/HRA).

City Council Initiative funding increases ILP's capacity to assist noncitizen survivors across NYC who have experienced violence here and abroad, including survivors of domestic and gender-based violence, with a wide range of immigration relief. We are seeking **a restoration of \$200,000 in Immigration Legal Services for Survivors of Violence & Gender Based Harm funding, a restoration of \$175,000 in Culturally Specific Gender Based Violence Initiative funding, a restoration and enhancement to \$50,000 in Protect NYC Families Initiative funding, and a restoration of \$20,000 in Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) funding.**

SafeChat

Safe Horizon offers a continuum of services for all victims of crime through telephonic, live chat, and/or in-person supports. Safe Horizon's 24/7 SafeChat is a live chat platform that allows victims of all forms of crime and abuse to access Safe Horizon services digitally. Crime victims utilize their computer, phone, or tablet to safely and confidentially engage in a one-on-one chat with trained Safe Horizon Live Chat Specialists by visiting safehorizon.org. Live Chat Specialists utilize a best practice, client-centered approach to engage with victims by providing information and referrals across NYC, supporting victims in fully assessing their safety, and collaborating with victims to develop comprehensive safety plans. In FY25, SafeChat responded to 2,522 chats from survivors.

The City Council supports SafeChat through a **Speaker's Initiative**, contracted through DYCD.

For several years, the Council has awarded **Speaker's Initiative** funding to support the salary of a SafeChat Live Chat Specialist to enhance our ability to respond in particular to young men of color seeking help. We are seeking **a restoration of \$100,000 in Speaker's Initiative funding** to continue to support SafeChat's operations and the salary of this SafeChat Live Chat Specialist.

This support allows us to respond in particular to young men of color seeking help and intentionally build avenues for young men of color to access supportive services and healing.

Recommendations to Support Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY)

We were disheartened to see cuts to the RHY budget in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget, but we are now hearing that those cuts won't be happening. That is good news, but I will take this time to say that the final budget must include the following:

- **Increase RHY Bed Rates to Reflect the True Cost of Care**

The bed rates for runaway and homeless youth programs must be increased to accurately reflect the true cost of operating these beds in New York City.

Providers are expected to deliver trauma-informed, youth-centered services that include housing, case management, mental health support, educational guidance, and connections to employment. Yet the current rates do not reflect the rising costs of staffing, rent, food, security, and supportive services required to operate these programs effectively.

Without adjusting these rates, providers are forced to stretch already limited resources, which ultimately impacts the quality and sustainability of services for young people. Increasing the bed rate is essential to ensure programs can maintain staffing levels, provide safe and welcoming environments, and deliver the comprehensive supports youth need to stabilize.

- **Release the RFP to Procure the Full RHY System**

The City must release the Request for Proposals (RFP) to procure the full Runaway and Homeless Youth system.

For too long, providers and young people alike have operated under uncertainty due to delayed procurement processes. The RHY system plays a critical role in the continuum of care for young people experiencing homelessness, and providers need stability to plan, hire staff, and expand services where they are needed most.

Releasing the RFP will allow the City to strengthen and modernize the system while ensuring that providers can continue to deliver consistent services to vulnerable youth.

- **Baseline Funding for Peer Navigators**

We urge the Council to baseline the **\$1.6 million** for Peer Navigators.

Peer Navigators are individuals with lived experience who serve as trusted guides for young people navigating complex systems. They help youth access services, remain engaged in programs, and feel seen and understood in ways that traditional systems too often fail to provide.

For many young people, especially those who have experienced distrust of institutions, a peer with lived experience can be the difference between disengaging from services and

staying connected long enough to stabilize. Baseline funding ensures that this vital workforce remains a permanent and sustainable part of the RHY system. And it provides the certainty organizations need to recruit and hire.

- **Baseline Funding for Housing Navigators**

We strongly urge the Council to baseline the **\$1.6 million** for Housing Navigators.

Housing Navigators play a critical role in helping young people move from homelessness to permanent housing. Securing housing in New York City is incredibly complex, particularly for young people who may not have income, credit history, or family support.

Housing Navigators assist youth with voucher applications, apartment searches, landlord negotiations, and the extensive documentation required to secure housing. Their work has been transformative in helping young people transition from shelters and drop-in centers into stable homes.

Without these positions, many young people simply would not be able to navigate the housing system on their own.

- **Increase Beds for Young Adults Ages 21–24**

We must also increase the number of beds available for young adults ages 21 to 24.

Young people in this age group often fall into a dangerous gap between youth services and adult shelter systems. Many have aged out of foster care or youth programs and are still in the process of completing school, securing employment, or stabilizing their mental health.

Placing these young adults into the adult shelter system can expose them to environments that are not developmentally appropriate and can increase their vulnerability. Expanding beds specifically for this age group allows programs to provide tailored supports that help young adults successfully transition into independence.

- **Increase Beds to Support Minors**

We must increase beds for minors experiencing homelessness.

Young people under 18 who are experiencing homelessness are among the most vulnerable in our city. Many are fleeing abuse, family rejection, or unsafe home environments. When the system lacks sufficient beds, these youth are often forced to rely on unsafe alternatives - sleeping on couches, staying with strangers, or surviving on the streets.

Ensuring that there are enough beds available for minors is not only a moral responsibility but also a critical step in preventing exploitation, trafficking, and long-term homelessness

- Lastly, we must, unequivocally ensure that youth experiencing homelessness can access **CityFHEPS vouchers** without barriers. Safe Horizon supports the Council in its demand that the Administration follow the law and fully administer and fund the CityFHEPS expansion package.

Investing in these areas is not simply about programs - it is about ensuring that young people in our city have a real pathway to stability, dignity, and opportunity.

Late Contracting Issues

We are grateful to the City Council for understanding the systemic late contracting issues that impact the nonprofit human services sector. Late contracts have a detrimental effect on community-based organizations and the communities we all serve. Great progress has been made because of the Council's movement on these issues through legislation to provide advances on contracts (LL156 of 2025, LL11 of 2026). However, much more needs to be done to address the millions still owed to providers across the city.

Frequent government contract payment delays put providers at risk of eviction and worsen deficits by forcing organizations to borrow to pay rent and salaries. Safe Horizon has, on many occasions, been forced to borrow money to sustain service provision to survivors while waiting months or even years for a contract to be registered so that we could receive payment.

The City's delays cost providers real money and jeopardize quality of services by diverting funds away from programs to pay interest on lines of credit, for which we are not reimbursed.

In addition, when nonprofits are owed money, we cannot respond to emergencies effectively because of limited cash flow to meet urgent needs. For example, during the pandemic, we needed to purchase supplies, like masks and cleaning equipment, and were forced to utilize our credit line for that purpose because of the city's payment delays.

As of January 31, 2026, Safe Horizon is owed \$5.1M across 15 contracts through DYCD and DOHMH. Many but not all of these contracts are related to the City Council funding detailed above. As the Council knows, these contracts are frequently registered long after the start date for services.

Int. 0452

Additionally, we urge the Council to support wage equity legislation that will bolster the nonprofit human services sector.

We are grateful for the multi-year COLA investment, which was a major victory for the nonprofit human services sector. There are still challenges, in that the COLA funding is implemented by agencies in ways that are overly restrictive. That investment ends next year so now is the time to push for true wage equity, where nonprofit workers are not paid up to 30% less than their government counterparts. We enthusiastically support Intro 452, which would be a huge step forward.

Government is not just the predominant funder of human services but also the main driver of human services salaries. Government either directly sets salary rates on contracts or does so indirectly by establishing costs for a unit of service along with required staffing on a contract.

New York City has relied heavily on the nonprofit human services sector to house, shelter, safety plan, and provide other critical services for survivors of violence. However, our government partners too often ask our community of nonprofits and community-based organizations to do more with less and to accept the bare minimum. This means that many - too many - nonprofit human services workers, the majority of whom are women and people of color, are barely surviving on the wages paid by underfunded contracts. Because many survivors come into victim services work to help other survivors, government funding for the nonprofit victim services sector is an economic justice issue for survivors. To live up to our shared values of equity, equality, and supporting communities, New York must commit to funding contracts at appropriate levels to allow nonprofits and community-based organizations to offer competitive living wage salaries. Pay equity is a racial justice issue, a gender justice issue, and an economic justice issue.

The human services nonprofit sector is dealing with a sustainability crisis. Organizations across the sector continue to lose staff because wages are not comparable to wages in the government and private sectors. Hiring and staff retention continue to be major issues across the field. Vacancies and staff turnover directly impact our clients – survivors of domestic violence, runaway and homeless youth, and victims and survivors of violence and abuse across New York City. When staff leave for a better paying job in the private, for-profit sector, our programs must reassign cases, which is disruptive to the survivors coming to us seeking safety and healing.

Intro 452 is a significant step towards ensuring that human services workers receive equitable pay comparable to their City counterparts. By establishing a clear wage requirement system, this legislation promotes transparency in compensation, ensuring that every worker is paid solely based on their qualifications and experience.

Conclusion

As the City Council and the Administration sets the budget for the next fiscal year, it's imperative that our city expand, perfect, create, and invest in programming that provides healing and support to people who have experienced harm, violence, and trauma. When we invest in the safety, healing, and well-being of individual New Yorkers, we invest in the safety, healing, and well-being of New York City as a whole.

And it is essential that the City invest in the nonprofit human services workforce that we collectively rely on to support our safety net. We urge you and your colleagues to listen to providers, our dedicated workforce, and survivors. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony.



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**Testimony to Committee on Children and Youth Committee regarding FY27
Budget**

*From Trenton Price – Executive Director, Salvadori Center
Monday, March 16, 2026*

Thank you, Chair Stevens and members of the Committee on Children and Youth. My name is Trenton Price, and I am the Executive Director of the Salvadori Center. I am a former middle school teacher, school leader, and district leader for arts education in the New York City Public Schools before joining Salvadori three years ago.

At Salvadori, we provide STEAM education services – that is STEM plus the A for Arts and Architecture – to schools, after-school sites, and NYCHA community centers across the five boroughs focusing on the built environment. For context, last year Salvadori taught over 12,000 students in 178 sites. Our goal is to make STEAM come alive for students through the built environment, and to foster the soft skills of collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving – just like real-life architects, designers, and engineers.

We are grateful to have the support of the Council through multiple CASA and Digital Inclusion & Literacy grants as well as After School Enrichment and the Speaker’s Initiative at numerous NYCHA sites across the City.

As a long-time partner of NYCHA for nearly two decades, we see first-hand the need for robust out-of-school time programming for



Testimony Before the Children and Youth Committee Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 16, 2026

**Madison Mouty
Director, Government Relations and Advocacy**

Good afternoon, Children and Youth Committee Chair Stevens, Finance Chair Lee, and members of the Children and Youth Committee. My name is Madison Mouty, and I serve as the Director of Government Relations and Advocacy at the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony on the work we do providing *Combating Hate in Digital Spaces* in-classroom workshops and assemblies to children, youth, and educators, as well as share information on a new workshop proposal for Fiscal Year 27.

Simon Wiesenthal Center is a nearly 50-year-old National human rights organization with a strong longstanding footprint and impact in New York. Our education team manages a citywide portfolio of school-based workshops that provide our digital literacy programming to tens of thousands of New York's public-school students every year. Our assemblies also reached over 975 students last year.

New York City stands at a pivotal educational moment: rising hate incidents, the fading presence of survivor testimony, and increasing historical misinformation converge to create an urgent need for media literacy. That's where our programs come in. Across New York City, through the support of the City Council, Simon Wiesenthal Center operates *Combating Hate in Digital Spaces*, a workshop that provides students with reflections on how their digital selves are shaped, as well as the responsibilities and real-world consequences that accompany their online presence.

Combating Hate in Digital Spaces is a learning experience designed for Middle and High School students. Learners explore the formation of online identities and examine how digital systems such as AI and the algorithm influence and manipulate individual actions in digital spaces. This community-rooted education initiative focuses on emotional responses in online environments while analyzing diverse social media feeds and perspectives. By examining algorithmic tactics and echo chambers used by digital creators to spread mis and disinformation, students will develop critical digital citizenship skills—equipping them with holistic strategies for ethical online engagement situating them as contributors to the reduction of digital harm, online hate speech, bias, bigotry, and bullying.

Funding for FY25 was used to deliver a total of 463 (450 classroom and 13 assembly style) in-person *Combating Hate in Digital Spaces* workshops to over 11,000 public middle and high school students, grades 5 – 12, in 47 schools across the five boroughs. In FY25, educators and facilitators taught more than 357 total student instruction hours over the course of the school year. We have and are continuing to work in partnership with schools across the five boroughs to schedule Combat Hate workshops and assemblies for the current fiscal year.

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In FY'27, we are requesting your advocacy and support for a restored allocation of \$750,000 from the Speaker's initiative to address Boroughwide Needs and a \$500,000 request from Citywide Initiatives including: Digital Inclusion and Literacy, Hate Crimes Prevention, AI Community Engagement, and Violence Prevention and Intervention for Youth and Young Adults.

This critical funding would enable us to sustain and expand crucial anti-hate, -bias, and -bigotry educational workshops for up to 14,000 students, deepen partnerships with NYC public schools and community groups, and respond quickly to emerging community tensions in real-time, such as the incident response and support we've provided to students and staff at JHS 194 William Carr, Hillcrest High School, and PS 261.

This program fosters a safe, inclusive learning environment, ensuring that difficult conversations are handled with sensitivity, respect for civil liberties, and a focus on youth leadership and allyship. Designed with a whole community approach, the workshop strengthens collaboration between students and the community. It creates a space for critical conversations about online safety and combating hate while also empowering youth to take an active role in creating solutions. As hate speech and bias-related incidents rise, programs like this are essential to fostering understanding and resilience in school communities.

We are also requesting your advocacy for a **new** \$500,000 initiative proposal and support through Citywide Initiatives for *Witness to History: Introduction to Testimony*, a workshop for students in grades 9–12 that uses survivor testimony from the Holocaust and the Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda to teach how history is created, remembered, and communicated. *Witness to History* addresses a gap not filled by existing school curricula: the cultivation of empathy grounded in media literacy by witnessing real human voices and a responsibility to respond to injustice in the present.

Witness to History offers a proven, research-informed response—one that does not merely teach about the past but shapes the citizens of New York's future depends upon. Support at the requested level will ensure that thousands of young New Yorkers encounter history not as distant tragedy, but as living responsibility—carried forward through memory, empathy, and dialogue. *Witness to History* addresses a gap not filled by existing school curricula: the cultivation of empathy grounded in media literacy by witnessing real human voices and a responsibility to respond to injustices from the Holocaust and Rwandan Genocide in the present. Research in genocide and human-rights education demonstrates that testimony-based learning—encountering individual stories of survival, loss, and moral courage—is among the most powerful tools for reducing dehumanization and fostering long-term ethical awareness.

In communities that have experienced hate-based incidents or division—including schools navigating identity-based conflict—testimony-centered dialogue has proven to support healing, reflection, and renewed community trust. By moving students from passive observers of history to active moral participants, *Witness to History* strengthens the social fabric of New York City



schools and prepares young people to confront hate, distortion, and indifference in their own generation.

We are grateful for your leadership and respectfully ask for your support of these requests. We look forward to continuing to partner with the City Council to deliver these vital services for New York City's students and educators.

Thank you.

**Testimony of St. Nicks Alliance
Before the New York City Council**

**FY 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing:
Committee on Children & Youth Services
Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair**

**Submitted by Debra Sue Lorenzen, Director of Youth and Education
March 16, 2026**

Thank you, Chair Stevens and members of the New York City Council, for the opportunity to testify. My name is Debra Sue Lorenzen, and I am the Director of Youth and Education for St. Nicks Alliance, a settlement house and lead youth service provider in North Brooklyn.

I want to begin by thanking the City Council and Chair Stevens for your deep commitment to the children and youth of New York City. The most important investment today's grown ups can make in New York City's future is in our youngest residents. At St. Nicks Alliance and our affiliate School Settlement Association nearly 8,000 children, youth and adults benefit from DYCD funding of 11 COMPASS (Elementary, SONYC and High) afterschool centers; 10 Summer Rising or center-based camps; three Beacons and Cornerstones; one of NYC's largest SYEP initiatives; Work Learn Grow; Adult Immigrant and Literacy Services; and Train and Earn. We are deeply grateful for this investment in North Brooklyn that leads to higher educational attainment, healthy living, social-emotional skills and workforce readiness.

This testimony will focus on recommendations to support and stabilize citywide youth services in FY27 and strengthen the human services workforce including:

- Pilot an alternative summer program model for middle schoolers;
- Address flaws in the COMPASS Elementary and SONYC RFP
- Protect Cornerstone Community Centers through infrastructure accountability.
- Invest \$18 million in City Council funds for Adult Literacy services that sustains programs not eligible for funding under DYCD's Adult Literacy RFP.

Pilot an Alternative Summer Program Model for Middle School Youth

Although the FY27 Preliminary Budget has restored funding for summer programming, there is still more work that must be done to prepare for Summer 2026. In addition to tackling the operational issues that have plagued Summer Rising year after year, the City must work with local stakeholders to pilot summer program models other than Summer Rising. The Summer Rising model made sense when it was first created in Summer 2021 in response to the pandemic. Five years later, we need alternative models to better meet the diverse needs of families and children. We urge you to review United Neighborhood House's report "One Size Does Not Fit All" which reports on the disenchantment with Summer Rising by middle schoolers, parents, students with IEPs and English language learners. NYC Public Schools also released the

Summer Rising 2024 Impact Analysis, which revealed a statistically significant impact on student Math scores and a negative impact on reading scores.

Especially for middle schoolers, youth and families should have a voice in deciding what kind of programming is right for them. We urge DYCD to adopt non-Summer Rising programs, such as those provided in center-based, Cornerstone and some Beacons, that allow more time for outside play, postsecondary exploration, field trips, positive peer socialization, and hands-on learning activities.

Further, the RFP's proposed price per participant (PPP) rates are inadequate to properly fund 12-month contracts or requirements. The SONYC PPP should be \$7,682 per participant with summer, to reflect the need for 12-month contracts. Staff are hired year-round, not for ten months and the contract needs to reflect this reality. In addition, middle school years are particularly critical for socio-emotional and mental health needs. Added funding is essential to meet this need. **The City must commit to funding SONYC more generously, including alternative summer programming models and mental health needs.**

Protect Cornerstone Community Centers Through Infrastructure Accountability

Cornerstone Community Centers are based in NYCHA housing developments throughout the city. St. Nicks Alliance operates Sumner Community Center, where our high-quality programs and services create safe spaces and invaluable resources for 1,200+ children, teens and adults.

The Cornerstone Model model itself is grossly under-funded with level funding for more than ten years. Delivering contracted requirements for 1,200 residents on 2015 funding levels is simply not possible. A new procurement is desperately needed.

Cornerstone programs also face challenges stemming from failing NYCHA infrastructure. Sumner Community Center, for example, has faced collapsed ceilings, broken fire systems, malfunctioning doors, flooding, raw sewerage, HVAC issues, and the list goes on. In addition to obvious health and safety issues, delayed repairs can cause program disruptions, and lead to DOHMH violations and fines that are beyond our responsibility or control to repair. Requiring Cornerstone providers to cover the cost of violations issued by other city agencies for facility issues they are unable to resolve penalizes participants by co-opting funds that should be used for community programming. **The City must commit to covering the costs of DOH and FDNY violation fines for Cornerstone Community Centers when providers have already communicated the issue to DYCD and/or NYCHA.**

Invest \$18 million in City Council funds for Adult Literacy services that sustains programs not eligible for funding under DYCD's Adult Literacy RFP.

UNH advocates for an adult literacy system that provides quality, comprehensive, and accessible educational services for New Yorkers to improve their literacy skills, learn English, obtain a High School Equivalency diploma, and enter training and post-secondary education.

In New York City, an estimated 2 million adults have limited English-language proficiency or lack a high school diploma. No-cost community-based adult literacy programs such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), adult basic education (ABE), and high school equivalency (HSE) preparation programs enable New Yorkers to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to secure higher-paying jobs that can sustain their families, support their children's education, and advocate for themselves and their families. Adult literacy programs run by St. Nicks Alliance and other settlement houses and other community-based organizations reach, in aggregate, over 9,000 people each year and often serve as entry points for adult learners who are subsequently connected to workforce training support and other wraparound services that strengthen their families' economic and social well-being.

In FY25, the Department of Youth and Community Development's Adult Literacy RFP introduced new requirements tying program eligibility to specific Neighborhood Tabulation Areas (NTAs), which significantly limited which organizations could receive funding. As a result, many long-standing providers, including St. Nicks Alliance, were initially excluded from securing multi-year contracts and lost the funding needed to sustain their adult literacy programs in our own community.

To address the gaps created by the 2024 DYCD RFP, the City Council made a historic investment of \$16.5 million in adult literacy funding in FY25 and FY26. Ideally, these programs would be supported by a robust, baselined program managed by DYCD that offered students and providers stability with year-over-year funding. However, until DYCD revisits its unnecessarily restrictive stance on geographic priority for programming, **it is crucial that the City Council increases its investment to \$18 million to make sure that more adult learners can have access to quality classes.**

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

**Testimony of St. Nicks Alliance
Before the New York City Council**

**Committee on Children and Youth
Committee Chair & Council Member Althea Stevens**

**Submitted by Larry Rothchild, Senior Managing Director of Workforce
March 18th, 2026**

Thank you, Chair Stevens and members of the New York City Council committee on Children and Youth for convening the hearing this week.

I am the Senior Managing Director of Workforce Development at St. Nicks Alliance. As North Brooklyn's settlement house and civic anchor, we provide diverse multigenerational services for our community with focus on young adults 16-24 in both our Youth & Education and Workforce portfolios. Our Workforce Center serves over 2000 annually with Education, Employment and Training.

As a Workforce & Youth & Education focused community organization St. Nicks Alliance's testimony focuses on ensuring essential funding for NYC YouthBuild programs who are part of the NYC YouthBuild Collaborative. St. Nicks Alliance has been running a successful YouthBuild program in North and Central Brooklyn including Crown Heights, Bed Stuy, Flatbush, Bushwick, East NY, and Williamsburg since 2021 as a qualified USDOL YouthBuild program for the last 4 years. The NYC Council funding is critical to support key elements of the YouthBuild initiative including training, work experience internship, stipends, HSE, leadership and community development and youth advocacy.

Support the YouthBuild Training & Education Model for Youth in North Brooklyn & NYC

The YouthBuild Model is unique in that it marries both education and training. Our Young Adults are engaged for a minimum of 6 months and receive support in getting their HSE. They also receive intensive industry training and certifications in Construction and Healthcare (CNA/PCT). All of our young adults receive Mental Toughness, Workplace Success Job Readiness, Hands-On Industry Vocational Training, and receive a 200-hour paid work experience on a St. Nicks Alliance affordable housing project or at a local hospital or Nursing Home in our Brooklyn Community.

The NYC Collaborative member organizations running high-quality YouthBuild programs for young adults to put them on a pathway to career success and economic stability require ongoing support from the NYC Council Committee Council on Children and Youth .

Invest in NYC YouthBuild Programs

In recent years funding has shifted to include programs who are not part of the NYC YouthBuild Collaborative and who are not running the YouthBuild nationally and globally recognized training model. We ask that the NYC YouthBuild Collaborative organizations including St. Nicks Alliance that are supporting young adults across NYC with the core elements of the USDOL YouthBuild

be supported with this critical funding in NYC to support the delivery of critical YouthBuild elements to our young adult community members.

Conclusion

This NYC Council funding initiative builds a more equitable opportunity for our young adults to support education and career pathway development leading to economic sustainability. We ask the committee to support NYC YouthBuild Coalition members who are running YouthBuild programs to support this critical funding to ensure the young adults in our communities receive the support they need to be successful.

Thank you for your time. To follow up, you can contact me at lrothchild@stnicksalliance.org.

Testimony by Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles of The Brotherhood Sister Sol

For over 30 years, The Brotherhood Sister Sol (BroSis) has been at the forefront of social justice; educating, organizing and training to challenge inequity and champion opportunity for all. With a focus on Black and Latinx youth, BroSis is where young people claim the power of their history, identity and community to build the future they want to see. BroSis provides around-the-clock support and wraparound programming, making space for Black and Latinx young people to examine their roots, define their stories and awaken their agency.

All youth deserve safe, high-quality, holistic, and positively transformative educational experiences. If we believe in equity and want to create the futures all New Yorkers deserve, we must build within our schools systems of accountability, restorative justice, and behavioral management that do not include the NYPD *and* holistically support student success. Our vision for education in New York public schools includes safe, restorative, and healing environments where all students have the opportunity to learn and grow. To meet this goal, we must equitably resource New York State public schools and defund the tactics that push out marginalized students.

Faced with mental health, loneliness, and homelessness polycrises, now more than ever, our youth need city officials to do *more*. The current budget is a step in the right direction. That said, our communities are contending with federal threats to our education system and our LGBTQIA+ and non-citizen family members. Our city budget, therefore, needs to fully fund meaningful Restorative Justice, mental health, and immigrant protections in schools. City Council members should redirect the funding currently going to school police and policing infrastructure to the healing-centered programs and staff our schools, without which our schools cannot thrive. Moreover, we ask that you divest from school policing, including ceasing all NYPD recruitment, hiring and training of school police, and funding for surveillance technology.

Thereafter, the City Council should prioritize the following in budget negotiations:

1. Endowing access to childcare, 2K-12, and CUNY public education systems *and* ensuring any funding lost by due to historic or impending funding cuts is restored
2. Funding meaningful support for *all* marginalized New Yorkers – including legal, mental health, medical, and other essential services.
3. Allocating money to efforts that directly benefit NYC youth – YWI, SYEP, etc.
4. Investing in Crisis to Care and Wellness continuua that transform, not end, lives
5. Staking money on housing efforts prioritized in City for All efforts of 2025

To advance and protect our city and this next generation, we must provide them with the academic, social, and life skills necessary to be engaged and innovative world citizens. We need elected officials to invest in our students, our communities, and our success – now more than ever.

For more information, contact the Senior Organizing Strategist, Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles at mjc@brotherhood-sistersol.org.



To: NYC Council Committee on Children and Youth
From: Humberto Porras, Social Studies Department Chair at Broome Street Academy Charter High School; Policy and Strategy Intern at The Door
Date: March 18, 2026
Re: Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget: Supports for Children and Youth

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to share my insights into the day-to-day challenges facing New York City's teens and young adults as they pursue their post-secondary goals. My name is Humberto Porras, and I am testifying on behalf of The Door and the dedicated community of staff and scholars at Broome Street Academy Charter High School. Every day, our scholars and educators show up with resilience and determination to learn and teach, despite significant adversities that have been intensified by federal policies over the past year. I am here to express strong support for initiatives and investments that prioritize young people's post-secondary success, regardless of their immigration status, socioeconomic background, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

For more than 50 years, The Door has been a trusted place for young people, serving nearly 9,000 youth ages 12 to 24 each year. At The Door, teens and young adults can access a wide range of services including mental health counseling, health and nutrition assistance, legal services, housing support, arts, education, and career guidance. At The Door, everything is free, and everyone is welcome. In addition to its core services, The Door provides opportunities for academic achievement and scholarship through Broome Street Academy Charter High School (BSA), a public charter school co-located within our lower Manhattan site. Serving up to 300 students per year from across all five boroughs, BSA sets aside 50% of the seats for students who are transitionally housed or who have had systems involvement.

Given the high level of need within the communities we serve, BSA is a place where educators must lead with intuition and empathy to identify and respond to the evolving needs of each scholar. Now, more than ever, our scholars face critical challenges beyond the classroom, spanning multiple areas of their lives, significantly affecting their academic engagement and attendance.

Fear of Immigration Enforcement and Barriers to Post-Secondary Access

Scholars at BSA have expressed serious concerns about the actions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Students report missing school due to persistent fear of local ICE activity that could affect them or their family members. These fears take a significant toll on their mental health and directly interfere with their academic engagement and success. For undocumented scholars, these challenges are compounded by systemic barriers to post-secondary access. Since they are ineligible for Federal Student Aid, many face academic and economic disadvantages that limit their ability to plan for college. As a result, they must rely solely on city and state level funding to pursue higher education. One BSA scholar recently expressed frustration as many of her peers are applying for financial aid and preparing for college, knowing that those options were unavailable to her because of her immigration status.

As an educator, it is deeply challenging to offer encouragement or meaningful solutions when existing systems prevent a prospective first-generation college student from pursuing not only her own aspirations, but those of her family. This reality underscores the urgent need for targeted investments and protections for undocumented youth. Funding and initiatives that ensure access to legal counsel for young adults are critical. Proactive measures, including increased school-based signage and comprehensive know-your-rights campaigns, are essential to protecting students and their families from the threat of ICE enforcement and affirming their safety in our schools.

Additionally, continued funding for efforts like the Unaccompanied Minors and Families and the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status initiatives are vital, as these provide pathways to lawful immigration status that expand financial and educational opportunities for post-secondary success. Support for these initiatives are a necessary response to the persistent barriers undocumented high school students face as they plan for their futures.

Food Insecurity

Many scholars at BSA also exhibit signs of food insecurity, including low energy, irritability, and lingering near food. Some rely exclusively on their school-provided breakfast and lunch as their only consistent meals of their day. For many students, it takes time to verbally express needs related to food insecurity, likely due to the stigma and prejudice often associated with acknowledging hunger. However, our young people provide insights into their needs through our daily interactions. For example, I try to keep fresh fruit on my desk regularly, and students frequently ask for a piece, often sharing that they did not have breakfast that morning.

This issue has been exacerbated by ongoing federal government disruptions that make Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits unavailable to some households and limit access to other food assistance programs. With the support of city and state funding, The Door has been able to provide young people in need with warm meals and food pantry access consistently. Continued investment in our food and nutrition programming through the Food Pantries and the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education initiatives is essential to ensure that all young people who access our spaces have reliable access to nutritious food and do not go hungry.

Access to Healthcare

The service most frequently accessed by BSA scholars through The Door is our health center. The Door's Adolescent Health Center is a Federally Qualified Health Center that offers free, confidential health services, including primary care, dental, eye care, dermatology, nutrition, and sexual and reproductive care services. All services are delivered in a welcoming, affirming environment that centers young people's identities, comfort, and mental health. This model of care is essential to supporting the wellbeing of teens and young adults and ensuring they feel safe seeking health services. However, recent federal policies have begun to limit our ability to access government funding by targeting organizations that provide gender-affirming care and comprehensive family planning services, directly impacting our ability to sustain this work. We strongly urge your support for our funding requests through the Gender Affirming Care for TGNCNBI Youth and the Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations initiatives. These investments are critical to sustaining gender-affirming health care and community-based mental health services that our young people rely on now more than ever.

We recognize that local leaders cannot fully address every gap created by federal actions. Yet, we are encouraged by the City's longstanding commitment to protecting and investing in its youth. The Door and BSA community remain deeply committed to serving New York City's young people, and we are hopeful that with your partnership and support we will continue to ensure that our most vulnerable communities have access to the services they need.

Thank you.

Humberto Porras
Social Studies Department Chair and Policy and Strategy Intern
The Door & Broome Street Academy Charter High School

Kofago Institute, Committee on Children and Youth - Testimony

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee on Children and Youth,

My name is Kevin McEwen, and I am the Executive Director of the Kofago Institute. I write to respectfully request your support for the Kofago Institute's 2027 funding priorities as we continue serving children, youth, and families across New York City through arts education, cultural engagement, and youth development.

The Kofago Institute is committed to creating meaningful opportunities for young people, especially those from communities that have been historically under-resourced and overlooked. Our work uses arts and culture as tools for education, identity-building, workforce readiness, and personal development. We believe that when children and youth are given access to culturally responsive programming, they are better equipped to grow as students, leaders, artists, and engaged members of their communities.

One of our most important initiatives is **Kofago Taraji**, our summer youth employment program. Through this program, young people receive paid opportunities to build leadership skills, gain workforce experience, strengthen their confidence, and deepen their understanding of culture through the arts. Kofago Taraji is not simply a summer job program; it is a youth development model that invests in the long-term growth and potential of young people.

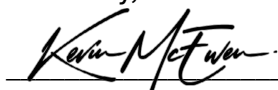
In addition, Kofago supports **K-12 and collegiate programs across New York City**, helping students connect arts learning to academic success, cultural awareness, and future opportunity. We also host the **Teranga Conference** and the **Culture Rising Dance Conference**, which create valuable spaces for youth, educators, artists, and communities to engage in learning, mentorship, performance, and cultural exchange.

We have submitted requests for support because the need is urgent and the demand for our work continues to grow. Our children and youth deserve access to programs that affirm who they are, expand what they believe is possible, and provide pathways toward a more hopeful future.

We respectfully ask the Committee on Children and Youth to support the Kofago Institute's 2027 request and to recognize the vital role arts and culture play in youth development across New York City.

Thank you for your time, leadership, and consideration.

Sincerely,



Kevin McEwen

Executive Director

The Kofago Institute Incorporated



**The New York City Council
Committee On Children and Youth
Chair: Council Member Althea V. Stevens**

**New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary
Budget for Fiscal Year 2027, The Preliminary Capital Commitment Plan for
Fiscal Years 2027-2030, and The Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Mayor's
Management Report
March 16, 2026**

Testimony of The Legal Aid Society's Juvenile Rights Practice

199 Water Street
New York, NY 10038
(212) 577-3300

Prepared by:
Anna Blondell

Thank you, Chair Althea Stevens and esteemed members of the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth for coordinating this hearing to examine the City Council Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2027. The Legal Aid Society is grateful for this opportunity to provide recommendations on how the City Council can, through budgetary allocations, protect children in New York City, especially those at risk of placement within the foster care, juvenile delinquency or criminal legal systems.

The Legal Aid Society's Juvenile Rights Practice (JRP) provides comprehensive representation for children and youth who appear before the New York City Family Court. Last year, JRP staff represented approximately 25,000 children. The Legal Aid Society represents most children and youth placed in foster care through New York City's Family Courts in abuse, neglect, and other proceedings affecting children's rights and welfare. Additionally, JRP represents the majority of youth prosecuted as juvenile delinquents in Family Court in New York City. The Legal Aid Society's Criminal Defense Practice (CDP) represents the majority of indigent defendants prosecuted in Criminal Court in New York City. JRP and CDP'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, most of whose cases are removed to Family Court. The Legal Aid Society has dedicated teams of lawyers, social workers, paralegals and investigators, and our perspective comes from daily contact with children/youth and their families, and from our interactions with the courts, social service providers, and City and State agencies. In addition to representing our clients in trial and appellate courts, we also pursue impact litigation and other law reform initiatives.

We address two discrete topics in our testimony: the need for the City to address its critical shortage of programs to prevent youth from becoming justice-involved and programs to provide alternatives to detention and placement and the need for the City to properly fund foster care so that orphans and disabled children do not have to pay for foster care.

1. NYC MUST ADDRESS ITS CRITICAL SHORTAGE OF PROGRAMS TO PREVENT YOUTH FROM BECOMING JUSTICE-INVOLVED AND TO PROVIDE ALTERNATIVES TO DETENTION AND INCARCERATION

We urge the City Council to ensure that the budget provides the preventive services and alternative programs necessary to meet the needs of young people in New York City. 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. Alternative Programs 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.¹ The Mayor’s Management Report, while significantly lower, nonetheless suggests the number is more than \$365,000 per youth per year.² Further, at a time when the secure detention facilities are well over capacity, resulting in the dangerous “housing” of youth in classrooms and deprivation of basic care and safety in the facilities, the need for preventive programs is even more urgent.

Preventive services can either be voluntary (separate from court involvement) or court-mandated (after an arrest, connected with a court case). The City Council’s Cure Violence/Crisis Management Systems is an important piece of the preventive services effort. As laid out in the written testimony of Michelle Fields, Supervising Attorney of the Legal Aid Society’s Community Justice Unit, submitted in this hearing, this effort is effective at reducing violence, but funding cuts for CJU significantly hamper its ability to fulfill its mission. See Fields written testimony, submitted March 16, 2026. Court mandated services are often in the form 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

¹ 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>

² Mayor’s Management Report, Sept. 2025, at p. 250, available at https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2025/2025_mmr.pdf.

the legal system, as well as for more court-mandated programs to end unnecessary detention and incarceration and prevent recidivism.

Most arrests in New York City come from a handful of neighborhoods.³ 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. In addition to the Cure Violence/Crisis Management Services, such as through Legal Aid’s Community Justice Unit, school settings present 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.⁴ 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.⁵

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 juvenile and or criminal legal system.⁶ 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

³ See e.g., <https://equity.nyc.gov/domains/personal-and-community-safety/arrests> (citing seven neighborhood accounting for a disproportionate number of arrests).

⁴ 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

⁵ Id.

⁶ See “Disrupting the School-Prison Nexus in New York” (1/5/2023), <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/news/disrupting-school-prison-nexus-new-york>

to arrests.⁷ 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 after-school programs. Increasing access to preventative services and behavioral support 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.⁸ 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.”⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ More preventive services and programs with a mental health component are critically needed to prevent entanglement in the legal system.¹² 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.¹³ Data also indicates that school-based mental health services reduce racial disparities in access to mental health care.¹⁴

⁷ Id.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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>.

¹⁰ See, e.g., The Healing-Centered Schools Task Force Report, July 2021, available at <https://advocate.nyc.gov/static/assets/HCSTF%20Recommendations%20Report.pdf>, at pp. 20-21.

¹¹ Id.

¹² 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.)

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Id.

NYC youth emphasized their needs for mental health services in their 2023 Youth Agenda.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ This is an unacceptable reality for youth who are also reporting high rates of stress and anxiety.

Of those young people who do obtain mental health services, over 75% received treatment in school.¹⁷ School Based Mental Health Clinics (SBMHCs) provide direct and timely access to mental health treatment and support for students and their families. Medicaid provides most funding for SBMHCs but does not adequately cover the range of supports and services that students and school communities need. Additional funding is needed to fill this gap to provide vital services, such as for clinicians to consult with school personnel on specific behavioral supports for classrooms and individual students, to provide trainings and support to the full school staff on behavior support, and to remain on call to de-escalate student crises.

FY 27 Budget Puts Students in High-Need Schools At Risk Of Losing Critical Mental Health Services

One innovative program that supports the mental health needs of youth attending high needs schools is the **Mental Health Continuum**,¹⁸ a cross-agency partnership between New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), NYC Health + Hospitals (H+H), and the NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) to help students struggling with mental health challenges receive appropriate, and timely care. Last year 20,000 students at 50 schools in the Bronx and Brooklyn through school partnerships with H+H mental health clinics that provide expedited access to mental healthcare, dedicated staff to provide students with timely access to mental health services, consultation with school leadership and school-based support teams, a 988 hotline to advise school staff with mental health inquiries, Children’s Mobile Crisis Team to respond to students in crisis, and training for school staff in Collaborative Problem Solving to build their

¹⁵ See <https://yvoteny.org/nyc-youth-agenda/>

¹⁶ 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.”

¹⁷ American Academy of Pediatrics, School-Based Mental Health: Pediatric Mental Health Minute Series, <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/mental-health-minute/school-based-mental-health>.

¹⁸ NYC The Mental Health Continuum, <https://mentalhealthcontinuum.com/about-us/>.

capacity to address student behavior. This model, which was highlighted in the City Council’s Mental Health Road Map, is supported with \$5 million in one-year city funding that was excluded from the Mayor’s FY 2027 Preliminary Budget. Funding also supported the opening of 16 school-based mental health clinics at Mental Health Continuum schools, providing over 5,500 students with access to care onsite. This program should be baselined and expanded to reach more students at more schools. Unfortunately, unless extended in the FY 27 budget, this funding is set to expire in June 2026, leaving students in high-need schools at risk of losing critical mental health services they need.

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.

The City Must Adequately Fund Preventative Services for Justice-Involved Youth.

Alternatives to detention (ATDs), alternatives to incarceration (ATIs), and alternatives to placement¹⁹ (ATPs) -- collectively referred to here as “Alternative Programs” -- inherently contain a preventative services component for justice-involved youth. Alternative Programs provide services and support critically needed by justice-involved individuals without jeopardizing public 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 be an integral part and partner of the City’s juvenile legal system.

There is a particularly acute need for this programming now as the City’s secure detention facilities are grossly overcrowded, and youth continue to be placed in dangerous and inhumane conditions. Since at least October, 2023, the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) has gotten a waiver from New York State to allow youth charged as juvenile delinquents and juvenile offenders to be housed in classrooms.²⁰ Youth have reported unsurprising and unacceptable difficulties with this new arrangement, including assaults and constant fear of assault, long delays in accessing the bathroom, no access to clean clothing or bedding, extremely limited access to telephones, and being woken at 5 a.m. to be moved out of classroom so that instruction may begin

¹⁹ For youth prosecuted in Family Court, a carceral disposition in a case is called “placement” rather than “incarceration.”

²⁰ <https://gothamist.com/news/teens-in-nyc-detention-centers-are-sleeping-on-the-ground-due-to-overcrowding-staff-say>

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.

Racial Disproportionality Pervades Detention and Placement

Access to Alternative Programming is particularly critical given the 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.²¹ Similarly, 71.9% of those admitted to non-secure detention facilities identified as Black.²² Additionally, many youth of color have experienced trauma and at least one significant issue beyond poverty that causes instability in their lives.²³ 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 last year.²⁴ According to The Mayor’s Management Report for Fiscal Year 2025 (MMR) admissions to juvenile detention increased by 26 percent, from 1,981 in Fiscal 2024 to 2,487 in Fiscal 2025.²⁵ Additionally, there was a 21 percent rise in the average daily population in juvenile detention - a 17 percent increase in secure detention (from 237.3 in Fiscal 2024 to 276.4 in Fiscal 2025) and a 44 percent increase in non-secure detention (from 41.7 to 60.0.).²⁶ 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

²¹ <https://cccnyc.org/data-publications/keeping-track-of-nyc-children-2022/?section=Who+Are+New+York+City%27s+Children%3F>

²² <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2021/DetentionDemographicReportFY21.pdf>

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

²⁴ Mayor’s Management Report for Fiscal Year 2025 at p. 249. Available at https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2025/2025_mmr.pdf.

²⁵ Id.

²⁶ Id.

further system involvement, and has a long-term negative impact on youth. With this increased census it is particularly essential to address the dearth of appropriate Alternative Programs.

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 and increase public safety as compared to incarceration.²⁷ 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.

Science has established that the adolescent brain is not fully developed until approximately age 25,²⁸ 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.²⁹

Alternative Programs also are dramatically more cost effective than incarceration. As noted above, the cost of confining one youth to detention is at least \$365,000 per year, and possibly more than \$900,000.³⁰ Instead, New York should invest this money into Alternative Programs, which are proven to prevent recidivism. Studies have established that rather than improving public safety, incarcerating youth increases the likelihood that they will reoffend as compared to community-

²⁷ 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”).

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ 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>

³⁰ Mayor’s Management Report, Sept. 2025, at p. 250, available at https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2025/2025_mmr.pdf; see also 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>

based programming.³¹ In addition, incarceration of youth not only makes them more likely to recidivate, but are also likely to be harmed and possibly even traumatized by the experience of incarceration.³²

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.³³ 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 a youth's home 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

³¹ 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/10.1177/0011128720926115> 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>

³² 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: "...[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]."

³³ See <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/juvenile-justice/protect-children-reform-the-juvenile-justice-system/>

intensive support. However, our staff regularly report a shortage of available home-based alternative programs, leading to unnecessarily long stays in detention and a lack of adequate supports in the community.³⁴

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 youth. 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 wait 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 is 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 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”).

³⁴ 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.

Unfortunately, the 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 fill this critical gap in programming.

Access to Education and Employment Opportunities.

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. 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.

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. 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.³⁵ 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 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.³⁶

³⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/12/08/one-cheap-way-to-curb-crime-give-teens-a-summer-job/>

³⁶ See <https://cccnyc.org/data-publications/testimony-oversight-oversight-summer-youth-employment-program/>

Support For Youth Transitioning Out of Detention or Placement or Out of Foster Care

The Legal Aid Society represents the majority of NYC youth in foster care and those prosecuted and placed in carceral settings. Funding is needed to establish a dedicated youth hotline to allow youth in congregate, detention and carceral settings to contact skilled advocates at The Legal Aid Society and to provide real-time support to address urgent safety concerns, mental health care, education, attorney communication, and family contact. As noted above, secure detention facilities currently hold more than 100 youth beyond capacity, placing youth in these facilities under tremendous stress. In 2024, Legal Aid assigned one attorney to address conditions in these facilities, who was immediately overwhelmed by the volume and urgency of need. To adequately staff this expansion, we seek support for additional legal staff, a social worker and educational advocacy staff. The services these staff will provide help increase community safety. By ensuring that youth receive the services they need while placed outside their homes and by connecting them to services in their communities upon release, our staff will help prevent cycles of recidivism. Our educational advocates will not only help to ensure youth receive appropriate educational services while in these settings and they will ensure youth are connected with and or enrolled in suitable educational opportunities upon their transition back to the community, supporting their future success and stability as emerging young adults.

2. THE CITY MUST ENSURE THAT ORPHANS AND DISABLED CHILDREN DO NOT HAVE TO PAY FOR FOSTER CARE

For over a decade, ACS diverted and kept Social Security Benefits belonging to children in foster care, **most of whom are Black and brown children living in conditions of poverty**, to pay itself for providing care. Former ACS Commissioners David Hansell and Jess Dannhauser have acknowledged that this practice needed to change. Commissioner Hansell committed to a “Child-Centric Social Security Benefits Plan,” stating that this regime change was “the right thing to do,” and would “provide concrete support to children and youth leaving foster care.”³⁷ Referring

³⁷ Administration for Children’s Services, Press Release: Administration for Children’s Services Announces Plan to Ensure Youth in Foster Care who are Eligible for Social Security Income have Benefits in Place & Can Receive Those Funds, December 30, 2021 (available at <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/PressReleases/2021/SocialSecurityIncome.pdf>)

to children in care eligible for Social Security Benefits, Commissioner Dannhauser stated boldly that “[t]his is their money, and they deserve to use it as they see fit.”³⁸

ACS does not have a finalized policy defining its practice relating to federal benefits for children in foster care. We must rely on a draft policy proposed years ago and never finalized, as we believe this outlines ACS’s current practice. The changes that ACS promised to enact do not go far enough, and ACS’s practice must be further revised to create a truly equitable economic support structure for orphans and disabled children in foster care.

The City must ensure that ACS allows all Social Security Benefits to go directly to the children who need them. Children entitled to Survivors and Disability Benefits must be permitted to use and conserve these benefits; they can provide critical, possibly life-altering funds to this most vulnerable population.

The City Must Earmark \$18.8 Million To Reimburse Orphaned Children Whose Survivors Benefits Were Diverted By ACS

Between 2011 and July 2022, ACS collected \$18.8 million dollars of Survivors Benefits on behalf of children in foster care and used that money as a revenue stream to pay its own administrative costs.³ Councilmember Stevens has called for the money taken from orphaned children to be returned to them.³⁹ Alex Adams, the new Assistant Secretary of the US Department of Health and Human Services heading the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), has publicly opposed the practice of diverting Survivors benefits from children in foster care. He has described the practice of taking these benefits as an “orphan tax,” stating plainly that “every earned benefit dollar belongs to these foster youth, not the government agencies or bureaucrats.”⁴⁰ ACF

³⁸ *New York City will stop collecting Social Security money from children in foster care*, NPR and WNYC, Joseph Shapiro, March 9, 2022 (available at <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/09/1084620883/new-york-city-will-stop-collecting-social-security-money-from-children-in-foster#:~:text=Child%20welfare%20officials%20in%20New.criticized%20by%20advocates%20for%20children>).

³⁹ <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/city-hall-reacts-to-claims-ac-s-took-funds-from-childrens-survivor-benefits/5348559/>.

⁴⁰ NPR/WNYC, Trump administration tells states to end 'orphan tax' on foster kids, Joseph Shapiro, January 12, 2026 (available at <https://www.npr.org/2026/01/08/nx-s1-5608066/foster-care-social-security-orphans-hhs>).

has also issued letters to 39 states, including New York, urging them to end the diversion of Social Security Survivors benefits from children in foster care.⁴¹

Although ACS itself has recognized that this practice needed to be changed, children whose money was taken over an 11-year period have not been made economically whole.

Survivors Benefits are an insurance program. Adults who pay taxes on their wages automatically have money for this insurance program deducted from their income. If a parent subsequently dies, their child or children are eligible to receive Survivors Benefits to make up for the significant economic impact of their death. Historically, ACS took children who had family serving as their representative payee, had itself automatically assigned as representative payee, and then kept the money. ACS also found children who tragically lost their parent/s while in the care of the Commissioner, applied for benefits on their behalf, and kept that money as well. In other words, money that the federal government intended to stabilize a child's future, and insurance that their parents had already paid for automatically through their taxable income, was taken by ACS – and ACS's new policy does not create any mechanism for children and families to recoup that money.

ACS must create a system for allowing children whose Survivors Benefits were confiscated by ACS prior to July 2022, to seek funds directly from ACS, or to utilize other creative solutions, such as a grants program, to make them whole. ACS could reimburse the whole amount in a single year or spread the return over the course of a few years to lighten the economic burden. ACS could create a state grant program that would allow people who have exited the foster system and had funds taken by ACS in the past to apply to get money back.⁴² Grants could be made available to meet educational and employment goals, secure housing, get help with medical or mental health concerns, or pay for childcare. This exciting possibility would allow children who were in foster care to be made whole, as the federal Survivors Benefits program was intended to function, while using the money to which they had been entitled to tangibly improve their lives and address their

⁴¹ The Imprint, *Feds Asks 39 States To Stop Taking Foster Kids' Benefits*, December 11, 2025 (available at <https://imprintnews.org/youth-services-insider/brief-feds-asks-39-states-to-stop-taking-foster-kids-benefits/269388>).

⁴² Such a proposal was recently introduced in the Oregon state legislature, after vigorous advocacy by an advocate who was formerly in foster care. S.B. 557 (text of the proposed bill available here <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/SB0557/Introduced>).

needs. It would be a monumental step towards fairness, and New York City must be the leader in this field.

To each individual child who has lost out on the nest egg left by their parent, the money could be the difference between having a home and being in the street, having food and going hungry at the end of the month, or having childcare and being unable to work.

The City Must Ensure ACS Applies For, Uses, And Conserves All Disability Benefits For Disabled Children In Foster Care

While ACS has committed to changing its practice regarding Survivors Benefits moving forward, the landscape for disabled children in foster care remains almost unchanged. Although ACS has committed to “maximize allowable savings from Social Security Administration benefits for Children in foster care”⁴³ and “conserve SSI benefits up to the asset limitation imposed under federal law,”⁴⁴ its actual proposed policy and current practice falls far short of conserving the full benefit for disabled children. ACS’s plan for disabled children in foster care fails in two significant ways. First, for Title IV-E eligible children, ACS’s plan is to discontinue screening children for Disability Benefits eligibility – even where ACS knows that a child has a qualifying disability. Second, for those children receiving Disability Benefits, but ineligible for Title IV-E, ACS plans to continue to keep the bulk of the Disability Benefit to offset the cost of foster care.⁴⁵

The City Must Ensure That ACS Screens And Applies For Disability Benefits For Children Eligible For Both Disability Benefits And Title IV-E Funding

ACS is obligated to conduct regular, comprehensive screenings for disabilities for all children who enter care.⁴⁶ Evaluating a child for disability is a critical part of all safety and permanency planning – therefore, once ACS complies with its obligation to create a meaningful service plan for a child in care, it will be on notice when a child has a qualifying disability and may therefore be eligible for Disability Benefits. It cannot then simply ignore a child’s disability

⁴³ ACS Draft Policy, summary.

⁴⁴ ACS Draft Policy, section III.A.2.c

⁴⁵ While ACS has stated that it gives \$2,000 to disabled children who were previously found eligible for the benefit, to be transferred to them after they are discharged from care, this effectively prohibits disabled children from accessing the full breadth of their benefit, which can be tens of thousands of dollars. Additionally, some of our clients have been falling through the cracks and not even obtaining the \$2,000 promised to them by ACS.

⁴⁶ 142 C.F.R. §441.50.

in order to continue receiving Title IV-E benefits. Early screening and application for all children are essential to ensure that children receive all the benefits for which they are eligible.

The law and guidance from the Social Security Administration is clear: **a representative payee must opt to apply for whichever benefit is in the best interests of the child.** Federal guidance dictates the child’s best interests should control the decision about whether to apply for Title IV-E or Disability Benefits.⁴⁷ SSA’s Guide for Organizational Representative Payees prohibits an organization such as ACS from using “a beneficiary’s Social Security or SSI funds for anything other than their use and benefit. But more than that, [the organization] must make reasoned judgments to use the funds in the beneficiary’s best interest”.⁴⁸ ACS cannot be permitted to make a choice that benefits its own revenue stream over the best interests of the child.

Through partnership with the Public Consulting Group (“PCG”), ACS has historically screened all children to determine whether they may be eligible to receive Disability or Survivors Benefits “[u]pon the child’s initial placement in foster care.”⁴⁹ ACS must continue this practice and re-screen annually to determine if any child not eligible upon entry has become eligible. There is no doubt that applying for and conserving Disability Benefits is in the best interest of virtually all eligible children as compared to having Title IV-E funds flow to the social services district. By proposing to defer applying for Disability Benefits, ACS is ignoring the federal guidance, SSA’s guidance, and eluding its fiduciary duty by selecting the benefit that brings itself the most money, rather than the benefit that is in the child’s best interest.

ACS must screen all children for Disability Benefits early and repeatedly and must apply for Disability Benefits for all eligible children. The City must ensure that ACS has the funding to comply with the law.

For Children Ineligible For Title IV-E, The City Must Ensure That ACS Uses And Conserves All Disability Benefits

⁴⁷ U.S. Dep’t of Health and Human Servs., Administration for Children and Families, Child Welfare Policy Manual, 8.4D, TITLE IV-E, General Title IV-E Requirements, Concurrent Receipt of Federal Benefits (available at http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/policy_dsp.jsp?citID=76).

⁴⁸ Social Security Administration, Guide for Organizational Representative Payees, available at https://www.ssa.gov/payee/NewGuide/toc.htm#Role_Payee.

⁴⁹ New York City Administration for Children’s Services, Social Security Benefits Unit (SSBU) Policy and Procedural Manual, 10 (2017).

Despite promises to the contrary, ACS has continued its practice of using many children's Disability Benefits to "offset[] the cost of foster care," mandating only that \$2,000 be conserved on behalf of the child, while any additional benefit remains with ACS.⁵⁰

ACS is required to use or conserve funds to benefit the specific child – not the foster care system broadly.⁵¹ Furthermore, as the representative payee for kids in care, ACS has a fiduciary obligation under the law to use the money to benefit the child directly.⁵²

While Disability Benefits have a federal assets cap (if a person has more than \$2,000 in a regular bank account, the benefits are suspended until the money is spent down), Congress passed a bill in 2014 creating specialized accounts known as Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) accounts. These special savings accounts allow individuals with disabilities to save above the assets cap to help pay for disability-related expenses.⁵³ ABLE accounts allow a disabled child to save up to \$102,000 for a rainy day, without impacting resource limitations for SSA benefits or a host of other federal benefits.⁵⁴ Funds can be withdrawn to meet a child's needs including for education, housing, transportation, and assistive technologies and can also be conserved for future use.⁵⁵ While this is not the only account available for disabled people to conserve funds (others include Plan to Achieve Self-Support or "PASS,"⁵⁶ and Individual Development Accounts or "IDA"⁵⁷), ABLE accounts allow the greatest savings above the assets cap.

⁵⁰ ACS Draft Policy, section III(A)(2)(c).

⁵¹ 20 C.F.R. §§ 404.2045, 416.645 (Conservation and investment of benefit payments).

⁵² *Riddick v. D'Elia*, 626 F.2d 1084, 1088 (2d Cir. 1980) (representative payee has a "legally enforceable fiduciary obligation"); United States Social Security Administration, Program Operations Manual System (POMS) § GS 00502.113 (available at <http://policy.ssa.gov/poms.nsf/lnx/0200502113!opendocument>) (providing direction for SSA staff that "[i]f the payee tells you that he/she will not carry out his fiduciary responsibilities without compensation, deny the application and seek another payee.").

⁵³ Specifically, the legislative intent was to "encourage and assist individuals and families in saving private funds for the purpose of supporting individuals with disabilities to maintain health, independence, and quality of life." ABLE Act of 2014, H.R. 647, 113th Cong. § 101 (2014).

⁵⁴ Additional information regarding ABLE accounts is available at ABLE National Resource Center, <https://www.ablenrc.org>; 26 U.S.C. § 529A; NY MHL Art. 84.

⁵⁵ *What are qualified disability expenses?* NY ABLE, mynyable.org/home/how-ny-able-works/qualified-uses.html.

⁵⁶ Social Security Benefits information page on PASS accounts.

<https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/pass.htm#:~:text=PASS%20lets%20a%20disabled%20individual,eliminates%20SSI%20or%20SSDI%20benefits>.

⁵⁷ Social Security Administration Spotlight on Individual Development Accounts.

<https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/spotlights/spot-individual-development.htm#:~:text=WHAT%20IS%20AN%20INDIVIDUAL%20DEVELOPMENT,bank%20account%20for%20an%20IDA>.

Numerous jurisdictions, including Arizona, Washington D.C., and most recently, Idaho,⁵⁸ New Mexico,⁵⁹ and Nebraska,⁶⁰ require local districts of social services, such as ACS, to use these accounts to save Disability Benefits for children in foster care without jeopardizing their eligibility for the benefit moving forward.

As of 2023, over 150,000 people across the country were benefiting from ABLE.⁶¹ But ACS's policy ignores this option, and other specialized accounts, limiting children with disabilities to \$2,000 in savings. ABLE and other specialized accounts would also preserve a child's eligibility. Even without relying upon these specialized accounts, ACS could allow disabled children to conserve up to \$2,000 and then spend that money down to preserve their eligibility.

ACS must not continue diverting or keeping federal benefits intended for disabled children, effectively keeping families mired in poverty to benefit its revenue stream.

ACS must work towards economic stability for disabled children in care and must use and conserve Disability Benefits in the best interest of each child. The City must ensure that ACS has funding to comply with the law.

CONCLUSION

We strongly urge the City Council to ensure that the City funds adequate and effective preventative services to prevent justice system involvement of youth who are at-risk and to end needless incarceration of youth. 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. The City must also commit to breaking cycles of intergenerational poverty which lead to repeated child welfare involvement for families. Economic justice is a

⁵⁸ Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Director's Bulletin 2025-02, <https://www.sandiego.edu/cai/documents/directorbulletin2025-02ssabenefits.pdf>.

⁵⁹ CYFD no longer using federal benefits to pay for care it was already required to provide, agency says, Esteban Candelaria, September 8, 2025 (available at https://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/legislature/cyfd-no-longer-using-federal-benefits-to-pay-for-care-it-was-already-required-to/article_9b4f0c42-2366-48fe-be96-ea6d93a98cdf.html).

⁶⁰ Nebraska will no longer divert foster care survivor benefits toward costs of care, Zach Wendling, January 27, 2026 (available at <https://nebraskaexaminer.com/2026/01/27/nebraska-will-no-longer-divert-foster-care-survivor-benefits-toward-costs-of-care/>).

⁶¹ 2Q 2023 529 and ABLE Market Sizing Highlights, ISS Market Intelligence, August 14, 2023 (available at <https://www.529conference.com/2q-2023-529-and-able-market-sizing-highlights/?layout=print>).

critical step, and the City must ensure that ACS uses and conserves all Social Security Benefits on behalf of individual children.

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**The New York City Council
Committee On Children and Youth
Chair: Council Member Althea V. Stevens**

**New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary
Budget for Fiscal Year 2027, The Preliminary Capital Commitment Plan for
Fiscal Years 2027-2030, and The Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Mayor's
Management Report**

Testimony of
The Legal Aid Society
Community Justice Unit

March 16, 2026

Presented by:

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On behalf of The Legal Aid Society's Community Justice Unit (CJU), I want to thank the Committee on Children and Youth and the Chair Council Member Althea Stevens for holding this critical hearing on the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) budget. My testimony today focuses on DYCD restoring our funding for CJU's legal service programs for cure violence participants, staff, and their families to prevent undermining the cure violence model's progress in reducing gun violence in our communities.

I. THROUGH ITS WORK SUPPORTING THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, THE COMMUNITY JUSTICE UNIT PLAYS A CRITICAL ROLE IN REDUCING VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES.

The Cure Violence/Crisis Management System (CMS),¹ launched by the City Council in 2012, delivers a multiagency approach to reducing gun violence in New York City. Cure Violence is a community-based violence interruption model for reducing shootings that treats gun and gang violence as an infectious disease. It employs credible messengers from the community as violent interrupters and outreach workers to detect and stop conflicts before they escalate, to identify and help high-risk individuals, and to change the community's social norms concerning guns and gang violence. CMS encompasses the Cure Violence program and related programs that offer legal services, employment opportunities, school-based conflict resolution and mediation, mental health and wellness services, and other social support services.²

CJU was established in 2012 as part of the CMS model by the City Council's Task Force to Combat Gun Violence.³ CJU adopts the Cure Violence philosophy – that violence can be curtailed with early intervention and community engagement – and provides comprehensive legal services to CMS partners, participants, and community members to reduce gun and gang violence in their neighborhoods. We offer direct representation to thousands of New Yorkers experiencing legal emergencies. CJU's comprehensive legal services empower at-risk youth and their families to navigate crime housing, immigration, and any other legal issues that require assistance so they can improve their circumstances. *See* Exhibit A, Community Justice Unit 2024 Report.

In addition to legal counsel, CJU conducts extensive community outreach, including providing legal clinics and training at over 40 Cure Violence/Crisis Management partner locations and the catchment areas they serve. *Id.* CJU staff and attorneys hold community events across all five boroughs, including Know Your Rights events, rallies, and educational clinics. *Id.* To help combat youth's early involvement in the criminal justice system, CJU's community organizers lead several Know Your Rights trainings and workshops. *Id.* For example, CJU leads Youth Ambassador Training where youth learn how to organize their communities and teach other community

¹ Neighborhood Investments and Public Safety, New York City Council, *available at* <https://council.nyc.gov/data/cure/#:~:text=Cure%20employs%20credible%20messengers%20from,with%20respect%20to%20gun%20violence>.

² Report of the Finance Division, Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, March 19, 2020, *available at* [098-MOCJ.pdf \(nyc.gov\)](#).

³ The New York City Council, Task Force to Combat Gun Violence, Task Chairs City Council Member Jumaane Williams and Fernando Cabrera, *available at* <https://council.nyc.gov/press/2012/12/21/617/>.

members about their legal rights when interacting with police. CJU also leads cure violence workshops at schools and our CMS partner sites throughout the city.

Through these comprehensive legal services, CJU works to defend, educate, and organize community members. CJU's defense services include running a critical 24/7 hotline for legal emergencies, such as arrests and housing evictions, helping individuals obtain their rap sheets and seal their criminal records, and assisting New Yorkers with employment and family law issues. We educate community members on their rights to help them navigate legal systems and access vital services that respond to their legal and social service needs. We organize community members to harness community power and mobilize communities to advocate for resources and social justice. As a result of our work, community members receive legal services that they otherwise might not be able to access, and those services directly contribute to their improved circumstances and safer communities. *See Exhibit A, Community Justice Unit 2025 Report.*

Our services help stop the spread of gun violence and improve people's circumstances in numerous ways, so I want to highlight two specific examples that illustrate the essence of our services:

- A staff member from a community partner organization contacted us after their application to work with youth at a facility run by the Administration of Children Services (ACS) was denied on the basis that they had records from the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) claiming maltreatment against his son. The staff member was confused because in previous years he had never had an issue working in his capacity as a credible messenger in ACS spaces. What aggravated this even more is that his pay was being reduced because they could not provide his services in that program. We assisted the staff member by advising him how to request the documents from OCFS, we helped him draft a response, and we also entered an appearance as his representatives. After reviewing agency documents, we request an administrative hearing to appeal to the decision. We collaborated with the staff member to create a mitigation packet composed of character letters from community leaders amplifying his role as a credible messenger, public citations from elected officials underscoring his commitment to community service, and employment letters highlighting his unique skills as a youth mentor. We also helped the person prepare for the hearing by reviewing the questions he would be asked during the direct examination portion of the hearing, examining the exhibits that would be introduced, and familiarizing him with the format of the proceedings. On the day of the hearing, the staff member testified on his behalf about what happened during the incidents, highlighting his current role as a credible messenger, and he also elaborated on how he had a great relationship with his children. The judge issued a ruling in our favor that the OCFS reports be amended as unfounded and sealed because ACS had not shown by a preponderance of the evidence that our client committed the alleged maltreatment of his son. As a result of our advocate, our client can now resume working with youth and vulnerable populations in ACS without worrying about these records barring him from employment.
- A program director from one of our community partners reached out to us to support his son, whose rights were violated during a discriminatory traffic stop. The young man was driving with his friends in Harlem when two unmarked police cars began following him

for no reason, other than being a young Black male, to eventually pull him over. Video footage from some of the passengers shows the cops violently yanking the young man from the driver's seat, injuring his thumb in the process. The director's son can be heard in the video demanding to know why he was being pulled over, attempting to assert his rights, but the cops did not care, and they slammed him to the ground. The cops charged the young man for having tinted windows and for a failure to show his identification, which was untrue. We assisted the young man by informing him of his rights, providing general information about the arrest process, assisting him with submitting a complaint against the officers who were violent and discriminatory, and more importantly, by informing him of his civil rights so he could preserve his right to file a lawsuit for police misconduct. With the support of our Pro Bono Services team, we shared a list of vetted private attorneys who specialize in police misconduct cases. Our immediate support equipped the young man with the information to file a complaint against the officers who subjected him to police brutality, while also providing him with resources to preserve his rights to file a lawsuit against the police, which he did and that suit is currently underway.

II. THE ONGOING FUNDING CUT OF THE COMMUNITY JUSTICE UNIT UNDERMINES THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM'S EFFORTS TO ERADICATE GUN VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES.

CJU's budget cut is a disinvestment in underserved communities, particularly underserved youth because CJU's services target those vulnerable communities. This cut signifies a decrease in legal services which means more underserved communities – experiencing over-policing, unstable housing, limited employment opportunities, and an overall lack of adequate services – are unable to address their basic needs. We know that our communities thrive when they are equipped with resources and access to opportunities. When we reduce critical legal services, we are only further entrenching the long-standing barriers to justice that have disproportionately impacted them and preventing people from rebuilding their lives. CJU's funding translates into tangible services that help mitigate the root causes of violence and that fosters a sense of security and trust in CMS's broader public safety strategies.

The administration's ongoing cut to CJU's funding undermines the CMS work to reduce violence. For example, we almost had to reduce our 24/7 emergency hotline service. Our CMS partners rely on that service when their participants and staff are confronted with legal emergencies such as arrest and illegal evictions. The CMS organizations know that our comprehensive legal services have helped grow the number of participants in cure violence interruption programs because of our commitment to improving the lives of participants and their families. When we reduce our legal clinics, our Know Your Rights workshops, and our community events, that represent a disruption of essential services, and it sends the message that our most vulnerable communities are not a priority.

CJU's services are vital to the work of cure violence. Members of the Mayor's Action Plan (MAP) and the Office of Neighborhood Services (ONS), which is responsible for overseeing the contracts of CMS providers, attended one of CJU's legal education workshops. Following the workshop, they all agreed that CJU's legal services make up an essential component of the CMS effort to increase public safety in our communities.

The CMS/CV model has proven remarkably effective at keeping our communities safe. Recent data from the NYC Council Data Team showed that *“precincts that received a Cure [program] experienced an 18.1% reduction in shootings in the first year of the program. Additionally, we find a 16-19% reduction in the years after that, demonstrating the longevity of this change.”*⁴ A 19% reduction in shootings means that lives were saved. But the ongoing cut to CJU’s work is damaging the CMS/CV network by cutting off comprehensive legal services for New York City’s vulnerable communities.

III. INVESTING IN THE COMMUNITY JUSTICE UNIT PAYS DIVIDENDS BECAUSE IT IS AN INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITIES IN CRISIS.

Funding CJU is an investment in communities that are in crisis. And that investment pays dividends because CJU has proven to serve more communities in ways that directly contribute to our city’s public safety. In FY25 CJU provided 1,370 legal services, including 238 legal services to Cure Violence partner organizations and 1,132 services to Project Reset and Project Hope. *See* Exhibit A, Community Justice Unit 2025 Report. These numbers include 171 hotline calls and 6,415 event attendees. During FY25, CJU also organized 111 events, including legal clinics, office hours, and community town halls. The previous year, in FY24, we launched an advocacy campaign titled “Your Rights, Your Power” meant to educate New Yorkers about their rights during police encounters. This campaign successfully reached over 1.6 million fifteen to twenty-five-year-olds throughout New York City.

IV. THE REDUCTION IN THE COMMUNITY JUSTICE UNIT’S FUNDING IS LIMITING OUR STAFFING AND OPERATIONAL CAPACITY RESULTING IN FEWER SERVICES DELIVERED TO THE COMMUNITY.

As much as we want to replicate the successes of the past couple years, the 1.5 million funding cut is having a direct adverse impact on our ability to sustain prior service levels. In FY25, after the cut, CJU was only able to provide 1,370 services, a 56% reduction from the 3,186 total services from FY24 before the cut. *See* Exhibit A Community Justice Unit 2025 Report. This decline in services does not reflect reduced demand as CJU does not turn clients away but we have fewer staff and fewer opportunities to engage them in the community resulting in community members being left in a state of crisis without their basic needs met. As CMS has shown, reducing violence and promoting public safety requires a multi-faceted approach that includes legal support, community education, and systemic transformation. We cannot afford to lose sight of the long-

⁴ NYC Council Data Team, Cure Violence Programs in NYC, *available at* <https://council.nyc.gov/data/cure/>.

term benefits of these services, which have created safer, more connected neighborhoods and instilled a sense of care and trust between residents and the institutions designed to protect them.

Conclusion

Our communities thrive when they can access comprehensive legal services that improve their lives. To invest in community safety, particularly among youth in underserved communities, the City should restore CJU's funding so we can continue providing critical legal services to communities and meaningfully support the crisis management work to reduce gun violence.

Exhibit A

Exhibit B

The Community Justice Unit

THE
LEGAL AID
SOCIETY
CRIMINAL
DEFENSE



FY 2025 Report

July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

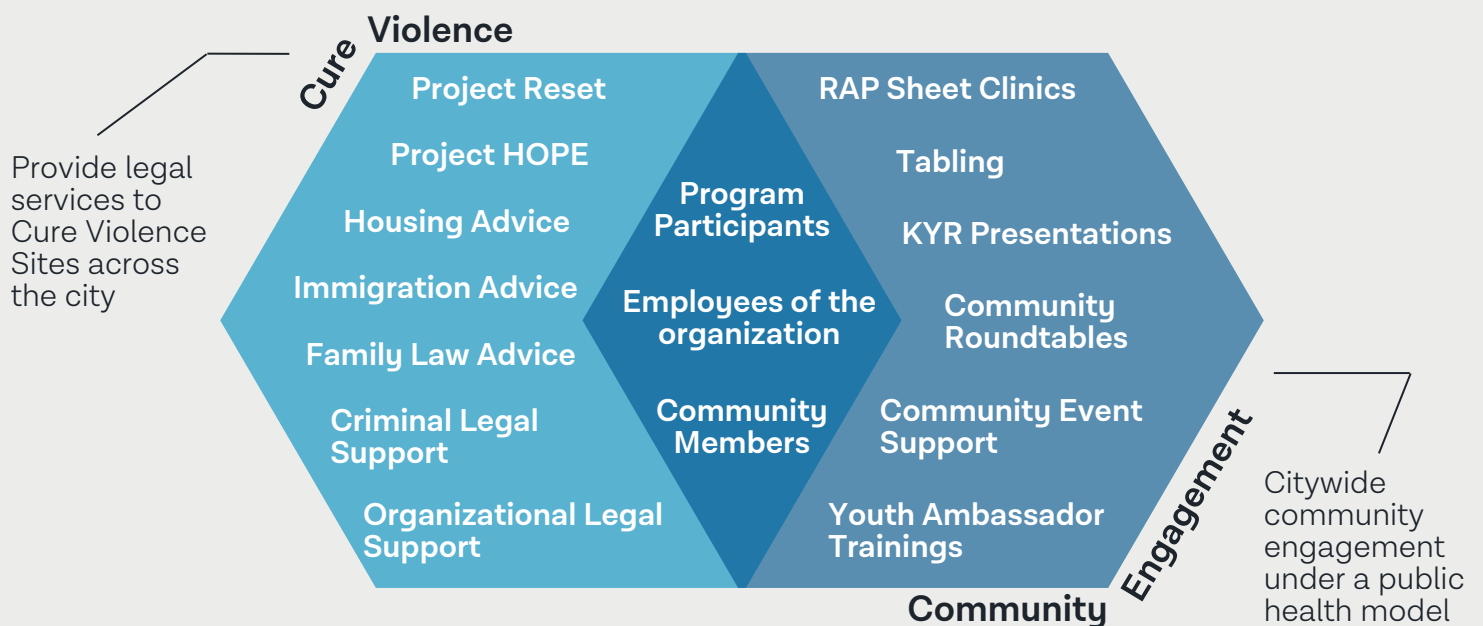
199 Water Street
New York, NY 10038
212-577-3300

legalaidnyc.org

Empowering NYC Communities

The Community Justice Unit
The Legal Aid Society

The Community Justice Unit (CJU) was established in 2011 as part of the New York City Council's Task Force to Combat Gun Violence. The Unit adopts the Cure Violence philosophy - that violence can be curtailed with early intervention and community engagement. Our work empowers underserved communities impacted by gun violence to develop proactive strategies to reduce violence through providing holistic legal representation, extensive community outreach, and public educational campaigns. Since 2014, CJU has become the primary legal service provider of New York City's Crisis Management System, a network of credible messengers who mediate conflicts and connect high-risk individuals to services that can reduce the long-term risk of violence.



Implementing the CV Model

	INTERRUPTING TRANSMISSION	REDUCING HIGHEST RISK	CHANGING COMMUNITY NORMS
MODEL GOALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent Retaliations • Mediate Conflicts • Keep Conflicts Cool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess Highest Risk • Change Behavior • Provide Treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to Shootings • Organize Community • Spread Positive Norms
CJU ROLE	<p>Provide legal support to CV partner agencies and participants intermediary role between communities and law enforcement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide legal support to CV partner agencies and participants—vertical cross-practice legal representation model. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amplify Community Voices • Challenge policies negatively impacting communities (e.g. MJ reform, gang database)
SERVICES PROVIDED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe Surrenders • 24/7 Hotlines • Emergency Legal Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rap Sheet Clinics • Job Fairs/Employment Training • Access to Benefits (Housing, Disability, Education, Healthcare) • Case Closed - Record Sealing • Immigration Issues • Court Information/Legal Advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shooting Responses • Know Your Rights Events • Community Events (Tabling) • Policy Advocacy/Reform • Awareness Campaigns • Pathways to College • Gun Violence Awareness



Our Services

CJU integrates the Cure Violence initiative into its legal and outreach services. The Unit provides legal support on various issues such as housing, criminal law, and crisis intervention. The CJU also operates a 24-hour hotline that assists community members facing arrests and illegal lockouts. This service ensures CMS sites have immediate access to attorneys who protect their rights when facing these critical challenges.

To engage the community members outside of CMS sites, the CJU hosts events like Rap Sheet clinics, Voting Registration drives, and Know Your Rights trainings. The Unit also organizes annual public awareness campaigns. Each campaign targets historically over-policed neighborhoods and shifts the focus from punitive measures to expanded community services and support.

Our Impact

1,370

individual legal services provided

1,132

of the individual legal services provided were to Project Rest and Project Hope participants

92

events hosted by CJU

6,415

event attendees

171

hotline calls received

76

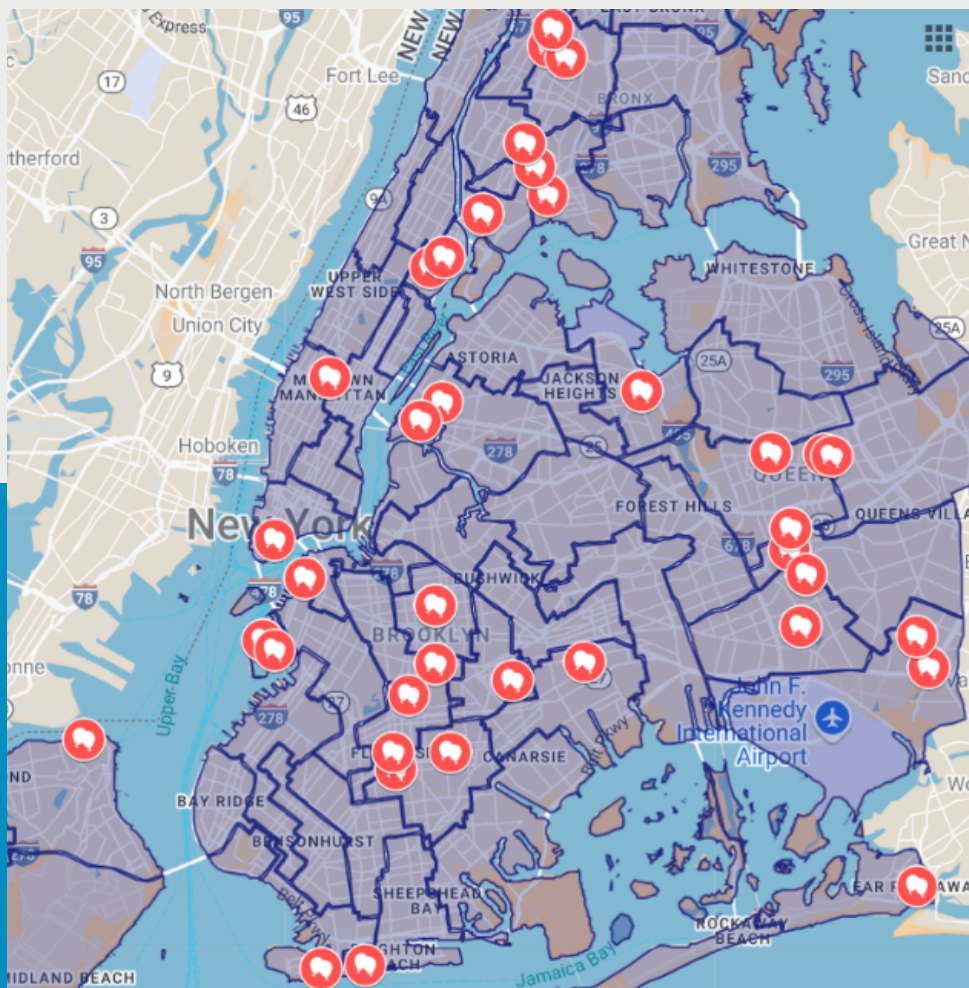
community engagement events, including rallies, shooting responses and advocacy meetings



Our Service Locations

The CJU provides services across all five boroughs, including over 30 Crisis Management System (CMS) locations and Cure Violence sites.

The map to the right provides an overview of New York City Council Districts with icons on the 25 neighborhoods served by the partner sites the CJU worked alongside during FY 2025.



District 27 Snapshot

CJU coordinated 3 events in D27, which attracted 181 attendees; CJU also provided 19 individual intakes within the district.

Our Most Served Partners



True2Life



Getting Out Staying Out

Midtown
Community Justice
Center

Midtown Community
Justice Center



Save Our Streets
Bronx



Man UP! Inc.

Our Advocacy

In July, the CJU joined forces with organizations across New York City to raise awareness about gun violence, promote community health, and support youth advocacy. During National Gun Violence Awareness Month, CJU participated in the Gun Violence Awareness Community Call for Peace event, following tragic shootings in Brooklyn that remind us of the urgency of Cure Violence efforts. CJU attorneys engaged community members at the SPF Cure Violence Health & Awareness event, while CJU organizers supported Queensbridge's "Occupy the Corner" Safe Summer event by providing brochures and legal assistance to attendees.

Housing attorneys offered legal advice to residents at Queensbridge Houses, and CJU continued leading Know Your Rights workshops. CJU also stood alongside youth advocates at the Invest in Youth rally, and celebrated women's leadership at the second Women in Leadership Conference.



In September, the CJU partnered with Bronx Rise Against Gun Violence (B.R.A.G.) and Stand Up To Violence, CJU stood in solidarity at multiple events, including "Occupy the Corner" in Harlem and "Save Our Streets" in the Bronx, raising awareness and distributing

resources like swag bags to strengthen neighborhood safety. Through their newly launched "Do NYC Justice" campaign, CJU informed underserved communities of free legal resources. In addition, CJU facilitated Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requests to help individuals challenge unjust gang database listings and organized voter registration drives at Rikers Island.





In September, The Legal Aid Society hosted its inaugural East Harlem Law Day. The event was co-sponsored by New York City Council Deputy Speaker Diana Ayala, East Harlem Community Board 11, Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine, New York State Assembly Member Edward Gibbs, and New York State Senator José M. Serrano.

The event invited New Yorkers to learn about their rights and get information about various areas of law, including housing/NYCHA, immigration, education, public benefits, community development, and more. CJU staff tabled at the event and provided information on the services they offer.

In October, the CJU supported Save Our Streets to end gun violence at the neighborhood level. Our staff participated in their shooting response and call to action in the Bronx. These events convey that the community will not tolerate violence and provide services to meaningful educational and employment opportunities.



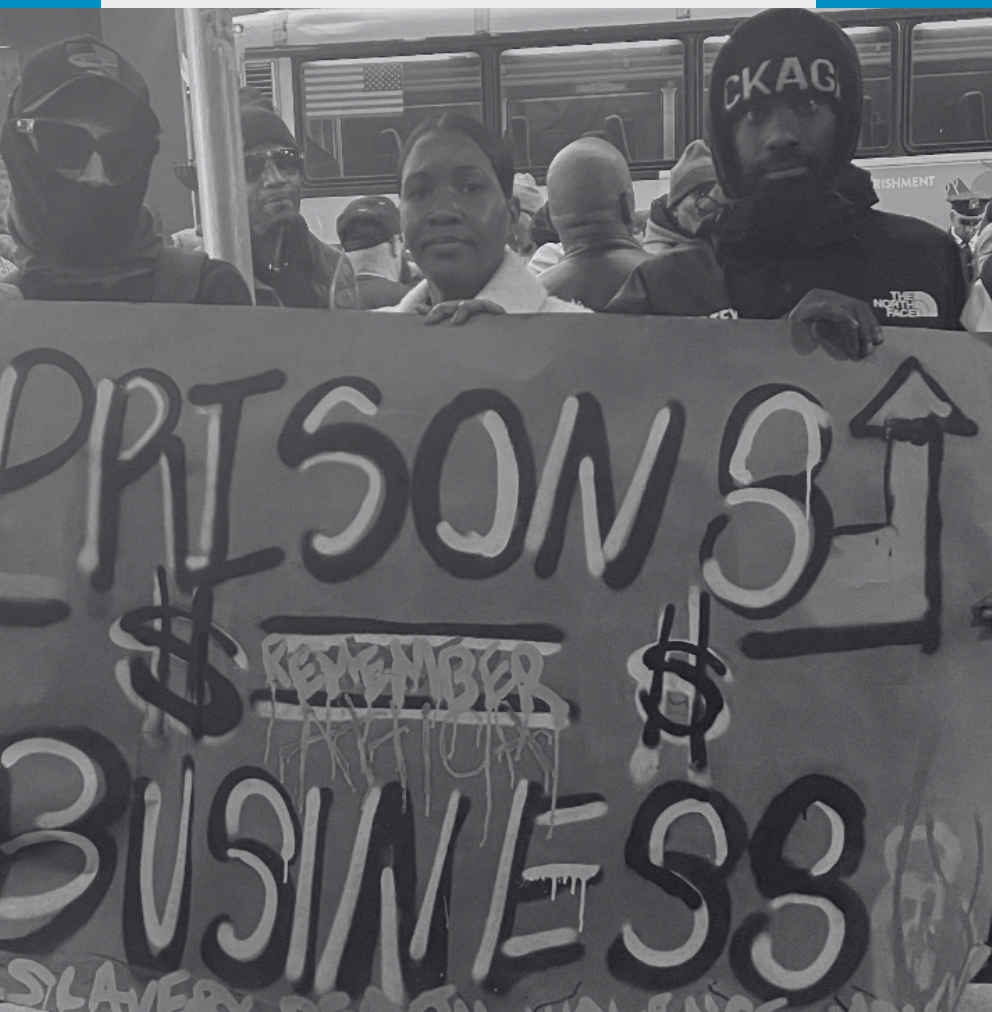
In March, the CJU stood alongside council members and the Gangs Coalition during a rally on the steps of City Hall in support of a bill to eliminate the NYPD's Gang Database. Similarly, CJU joined protests alongside advocates opposing mass deportations and ICE raids and challenged Mayor Eric Adams' directive concerning ICE access to city properties.

The CJU also participated in multiple events focused on holding law enforcement accountable, such as facilitating a planned rally outside of D.A. Fitzpatrick's office, standing in solidarity with families who lost loved ones in custody, and later marching around Governor Hochul's office demanding an investigation into the death of Robert Brooks and others affected by violence in New York State prisons.



CJU also continued its public education efforts, including its Know Your Rights workshops, which focused particularly on immigration and ICE encounters. Additionally, CJU helped educate partners from Community Not Cages and the Fortune Society on legislative efforts, including the Second Look Act, Earned Time Act, and Marvin Mayfield Act.

On the community outreach front, CJU showed strong support for violence interruption efforts. The team joined Cure Violence partners such as True 2 Life, Central Family Life, and Guns Down Life Up for outreach events in Staten Island and the Bronx.





CJU also participated in several Peace Week activities, including tabling at Willis Avenue and joining LifeCamp and other Crisis Management System partners for the celebration's closing event, where local leaders recognized community members for their dedication to peace-building.



CJU organizers spent April raising awareness for the Harlem Community Forum. At the end of the month, Legal Aid staff joined Harlem residents for a day of workshops, one-on-one legal advice, and open conversations about community needs. The event allowed Legal Aid to connect with the community and provided participants with resources related to housing, benefits, and other community matters.



In June, CJU joined Cure Violence organizations from all five boroughs for the Gun Violence Awareness Month press conference at the Times Square Red Steps. Leaders from the Office of Neighborhood Safety and DYCD delivered powerful calls to action to create a safe summer for 2025.

DREAMS YouthBuild - Program Testimony

A program of Two Bridges Neighborhood Council

Manhattan, New York

Council District(s): Lower Manhattan districts, including District 1 and surrounding communities, Crown Heights, Brooklyn and surrounding communities, District 17

March 19, 2026

Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing – Committee on Children and Youth

Dear Chair Althea Stevens and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget.

My name is Sheldon Steele, and I am the Director of DREAMS YouthBuild, a program of Two Bridges Neighborhood Council located in Lower Manhattan. We serve young people ages 17 to 24 who are out of school and out of work, supporting them in completing their education and accessing pathways to sustainable employment in high-demand sectors.

We are proud members of the NYC YouthBuild Collaborative and write to strongly support the continuation of YouthBuild funding and to urge the Council to:

Restore the NYC YouthBuild Initiative funding to \$2.1 million, consistent with FY24 levels.

At DREAMS YouthBuild, our program focuses on construction training, workforce readiness, digital literacy, and career pathway development. We serve young people from across Lower Manhattan, Brooklyn, and neighboring communities, many of whom face systemic barriers that limit access to education and employment opportunities.

Our participants often navigate housing instability, financial insecurity, involvement with the justice system, and long-term disconnection from traditional education. Despite these challenges, they show extraordinary resilience, determination, and a desire to build better futures for themselves and their families.

Over the past year, our program has:

- Supported young people in earning their high school equivalency diplomas and re-engaging in education
- Provided industry-recognized credential training, including construction and workforce certifications
- Connected graduates to employment opportunities and career pathways that offer long-term stability

One of our recent graduates, **Jasmine Craddock**, embodies the transformative power of YouthBuild.

Jasmine entered our program facing significant life challenges that once made completing her education feel out of reach. Through determination, consistent support, and the holistic structure of YouthBuild, she earned her high school diploma and rediscovered her sense of purpose.

Today, Jasmine is enrolled at University of Maryland Global Campus, where she is pursuing a degree in Psychology, driven by a passion to support others who have faced adversity similar to her own. She has also secured employment as a Behavioral Technician, working directly with vulnerable populations and making a meaningful, daily impact through compassion, care, and professionalism.

In addition, Jasmine is nearing completion of her NCCER credential, demonstrating her commitment to building multiple pathways toward long-term economic mobility and success.

Jasmine's journey is a powerful testament to the YouthBuild model. She represents what is possible when young people are given not only opportunity, but the support, structure, and belief they need to thrive. Her story reflects the broader impact of our program by transforming lives, strengthening communities, and building the next generation of leaders.

This is the impact of YouthBuild.

Our model is intensive and high-touch, combining education, workforce training, leadership development, and wraparound services. This comprehensive approach is essential for young people who have been historically underserved and disconnected from traditional systems.

City Council funding is critical to sustaining this work. It allows us to provide stipends, deliver hands-on training, and offer the individualized case management necessary for our young people to succeed.

Without restored funding, programs like ours will be forced to make difficult decisions that limit access for the very young people who need these opportunities most. With it, we can continue to grow, deepen our impact, and serve more young people across New York City.

We respectfully urge the Council to restore NYC YouthBuild Initiative funding to \$2.1 million in the FY27 budget.

Thank you for your continued leadership and commitment to New York City's young people.

Sincerely,
Sheldon M. Steele II, M.A.

Director of YouthBuild

DREAMS YouthBuild

Two Bridges Neighborhood Council



TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

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

**Submitted by:
Faith Behum, UJA-Federation of New York**

March 16, 2026

Thank you, Chairperson Stevens and members of the Committee on Children and Youth Services, for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Faith Behum, and I am a Manager of Government and External Relations at UJA-Federation of New York.

Established more than 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to UJA's mission is to care for those in need—identifying and meeting the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere. UJA supports an expansive network of over 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services and allocates nearly \$200 million each year to combat poverty and food insecurity, nurture mental health and well-being, counter antisemitism and strengthen Jewish life, and respond to crises here and across the globe.

Maintain the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for Nonprofit Human Services Providers

UJA appreciates the City Council and Administration's commitment to provide a 3% COLA for human services workers through FY27.

A COLA is a significant step towards addressing the historic underfunding and lack of investment in the human services sector, as these workers do some of the most important jobs in our communities yet are underpaid and undervalued. Government largely funds nonprofits and is responsible for the low wages employees receive. Low wages also have a sweeping effect on workplace conditions and the outcome of programs, with high staff turnover and vacancy rates resulting in heavy and unsustainable workloads.

With nonprofit workers earning 30% less than their government counterparts, it is clear wage equity must be obtained for the human services sector now. **UJA urges the Council to pass Int 0452-2026 which will make progress towards achieving wage equity for nonprofit workers.** Government is not just the predominant funder of human services, but is also the main driver of human services salaries, and either directly sets salary rates on contracts or does so indirectly by establishing costs for a unit of service along with required staffing on a contract. This legislation is a significant step towards ensuring that human services workers receive equitable pay comparable to their city counterparts. By establishing a clear wage requirement system, this legislation promotes transparency in compensation, ensuring that every worker is paid solely based on their qualifications and experience.

The legislation also states, “Before registering a human services contract, the comptroller shall affirm that the required wage and mandatory fringe is fully funded in the procurement.” Explicitly stating that the required wage and fringe will be funded by the City is crucial. While nonprofits want to pay their employees competitive wages, they cannot do this without increased funding included in their contracts.

Years of underfunding of the sector have resulted in the human services workforce being some of the lowest compensated workers in New York City’s economy. These are workers who do some of the most important jobs in our communities; they take care of our aging neighbors, care for children in after school programs, assist families in staying in their homes, provide workforce training, work with people to overcome substance abuse and addiction, and help people from all walks of life in the event of an emergency. The COLA investment is a step in the right direction to ensuring city-contracted human services workers are paid fairly. **UJA urges the City Council and Administration to continue their commitment to supporting this workforce by funding the 3% cost of living adjustment for City-contracted human services workers through fiscal year 2027. The City Council must also pass Int 0452-2026 the “Wage Equity Legislation” to create lasting change with how human services employees are compensated through City funded contracts.**

Investing in after school programs

A COMPASS concept paper was released in the summer of 2025 and proposals for the program were accepted at the end of November. Applicants are currently waiting to find out who was and was not awarded COMPASS contracts that are slated to start August 1, 2026. UJA urges the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) to release the COMPASS awards **no later than** April 1st, 2026 to give providers enough time to develop their programs for the 2026-2027 school year.

Current COMPASS and SONYC after school providers are overseeing programs with outdated reimbursement rates that do not reflect inflation. COMPASS after school providers receive between \$2,800 and \$3,200 per participant and SONYC after school providers receive \$3,200 per participant. The COMPASS RFP did include enhanced rates ranging from \$4,800 (school year) to \$6,800 (year round) for elementary slots and \$3,900 for middle school slots. Cost escalators are not included both in current rates and the rates proposed in the COMPASS RFP. And while the new COMPASS contracts will include higher rates, in the case of SONYC middle school programs specifically, the rates do not address the higher costs of overseeing these programs.

United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) produced a report in November 2023, where they analyzed the true costs of implementing high-quality after school programs in New York City.¹ They took into account increasing salaries for staff in after school programs to at least \$22 an hour and applying a 3 percent COLA and additional costs related to other than personal services (OTPS). Including COLA and costs related to OTPS, UNH found the per participant rate for SONYC after school programs to be \$5,500-\$1,600 more than the proposed rate in the COMPASS RFP.

The cost of living continues to increase in New York City while the costs associated with providing services to children, youth and their families are also on the rise. After school programs cannot maintain staff and operate high quality services while being paid rates that do not recognize these increased costs. In order to address the true cost of providing high quality after school programming, **the City Council and Mamdani Administration must commit to funding higher per participant rates for SONYC after school programs in the FY 27 budget and ensure all new FY 27 after school contracts include COLAs and cost escalators for the entirety of the contract.**

¹ <https://uploads.prod01.oregon.platform-os.com/instances/542/assets/True%20Cost%20of%20Afterschool%20November%202023.pdf?updated=1700510432>

Summer Rising

This past summer, six nonprofits in UJA's network oversaw Summer Rising programs. Each of these agencies managed New York City funded summer camps that existed before the development of Summer Rising. Years of overseeing summer as well as after school programming for children and youth across New York City has resulted in each nonprofit gaining an understanding of the needs of the communities they serve. And more importantly what it takes to run successful programming for children and youth.

Every provider in the UJA network recognizes that the families they serve need access to free and consistent summer programs for their children. Private summer camps are often too expensive or do not offer enough hours or weeks of programming to support working parents' schedules. Summer Rising provides free programming for ten hours, up to seven weeks (depending on the age of the participant) for those who were able to secure spots in the program. Many of the families who received Summer Rising spots would have difficulty securing other summer programming for their children making it challenging for them to work and provide for their families through the summer. Free summer programming like Summer Rising is essential to supporting New York City families. **It is for this reason that UJA is thankful the FY 27 Preliminary Budget included baseline funding for Summer Rising.**

The need for free summer programming is evident, however it is unclear if Summer Rising should be the only free option for New York City families. Many families who received a Summer Rising spot for their child or children were simply happy to have access to free programming regardless of its structure. If parents are disappointed in any aspects of Summer Rising, they often bring them to the attention of the Community Based Organization (CBO) overseeing the enrichment portion of the day. Specifically, many parents told CBOs they prefer having their children attend a typical summer camp style program that removes their children from classrooms and focuses on developing different skills through engaging in new activities. The popularity of the program may be contributed to it being the only free summer programming option for families.

While Summer Rising may make sense for some families, UJA-Federation of New York believes New York City families need access to different summer program options for their children. This means while Summer Rising is invested in, a traditional full day summer camp model must also be supported. Below are recommendations that will strengthen future free summer programs (including programs that resemble Summer Rising) in New York City.

1. Ensure CBOs have autonomy over the enrollment process for summer programs. This includes access to the waitlist for their programs, being able to both view and actively move individuals on and off the waitlist. Allow families to directly enroll with the CBO they wish their child to attend programming at.
2. Establish a baseline funding level for the DOE and DYCD portions of the Summer Rising program and baseline funding for DYCD for traditional summer programming that does not have an academic component enabling more effective planning for the summer. Transition all summer programming contracts to twelve-month contracts which will promote year-round planning for the summer.
3. Ensure summer program providers are compensated promptly. As of March 2026, many CBOs have yet to receive payment for overseeing 2025 Summer Rising programs.
4. Develop an information-sharing system to ensure CBOs have access to information regarding students' Individualized Development Plans (IDPs) and allergies.
5. Ensure paraprofessionals are available for all participants who need them, and a specific protocol is developed to follow when a paraprofessional is unavailable to assist a participant who requires this support.
6. Require DYCD and DOE to have greater data transparency regarding the outcomes of surveys completed by families who participated in any city funded summer programs.

UJA looks forward to working with the City Council, Mamdani Administration including DYCD and New York City Public Schools, to continue to improve and diversify summer programs for New York City families.

Child Care Assistance Program

Investments made in FY 2026 New York State and New York City enacted budgets, allowed the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) to decrease the number of children and families that would have lost access to child care subsidies through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). While UJA is grateful for these investments, 17,000 children in New York City are still on a waitlist to receive child care subsidies due to underfunding of the CCAP.

It is clear the Mamdani Administration and the City Council are committed to creating more affordable child care options for New York City families. As the City pursues this, the population who benefits from the CCAP must not be forgotten. The families who access these subsidies live in high poverty neighborhoods and have little access to additional resources to fund their child care needs. No affordable child care means parents and guardians need to make difficult decisions on how to care for their children including reducing work hours, leaving a job, or making suboptimal child care arrangements.

The New York State Executive budget included \$3.03 billion for the CCAP. A portion of that funding, \$950 million, is for New York City to be split evenly and used for Federal Fiscal Year 2026 and 2027. Both the Assembly and Senate accepted the \$3.03 billion investment in their One House Budget resolutions. The funding the State is proposing for New York City will allow ACS to maintain enrollment in the CCAP but it is not enough to supply vouchers to children on the waitlist. The State is expected to finalize their budget by April 1st. At that time, **the City Council, Mamdani Administration and ACS must work together to decide how much additional money the City will need to address the waitlist for the CCAP and ensure all children who are eligible have access to child care vouchers.**

2-K

UJA’s non-profit partners provide early childhood education to children ages birth to five across New York City. They provide a wide range of programs and resources to their communities and offer extended hours and year-round care for children, which parents and/or guardians rely on to work and provide for their families. Providers are extremely knowledgeable of the specific needs of the communities and ultimately prepare children for kindergarten and academic success.

These nonprofits oversee New York City funded 3-K and Pre-K programs and hosted private pay programs before publicly funded programs existed. Transitioning to and working in a City funded early childhood education system continues to be challenging. Before creating a City funded universal child care system, it is critical that the Mamdani Administration and City Council understand and address the issues facing nonprofit 3-K and Pre-K providers because these same issues will most likely impact any expansion of child care. Improving the current City funded early childhood education system will lay a stronger foundation to build the universal child care system.

Issues in the Early Childhood Education system that must be addressed include:

1. Delayed payments for 3-K and Pre-K providers
2. Community Based Organizations not overseeing enrollment in their own programs
3. Lack of comprehensive pay parity between CBOs and their New York City Public Schools counterparts

New York City families need access to affordable, high quality child care. UJA's nonprofit partners are ready and willing to provide this service. But the City must address the previously stated issues in order to expand the early childhood education system in a responsible way.

Adult Literacy Education

Adult literacy is critical to the stability and success of families across New York City. More than 2.2 million adults in the city have limited English proficiency or do not have a high school diploma, yet fewer than 3% are able to access adult education services each year due to insufficient funding and limited capacity.

This gap has direct implications for children and youth. When parents and caregivers are unable to access English language instruction, high school equivalency programs, or basic education, it limits their ability to support their children's academic success, navigate school systems, and access essential services. Strengthening adult literacy is therefore a key strategy for improving outcomes for entire families.

At the same time, adult literacy programs face growing uncertainty. Federal funding remains at risk, and proposed restrictions tied to immigration status could exclude many of the New Yorkers these programs are designed to serve.

To address these challenges, UJA-Federation of New York urges the City Council and Administration to:

1. **Invest \$20 million in a new city-funded adult education initiative, Education for Integration and Equity**, to expand access to English language instruction, basic education, high school equivalency, digital literacy, and civics education for immigrant New Yorkers regardless of status.
2. **Increase City Council discretionary funding for adult literacy from \$14.5 million to \$18 million**, enabling community-based organizations, CUNY programs, and libraries to serve thousands more adult learners.
3. **Consolidate City Council adult literacy funding under the Adult Literacy Forward initiative** to streamline funding, improve program consistency, and strengthen data collection and accountability across providers.

Investing in adult literacy strengthens families, supports children's educational outcomes, and advances economic mobility across generations. UJA urges the City to make these critical investments in the FY27 budget.

Conclusion

UJA-Federation of New York respectfully urges your consideration and support of these vital programs that assist New York City's most vulnerable and the organizations that serve them. Thank you for your time and if you have any questions, please contact me at behumf@ujafedny.org.



**UNITED
NEIGHBORHOOD
HOUSES**

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212-967-0322 | www.unhny.org

**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York City Council**

**FY 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing:
Committee on Children & Youth Services
Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair**

**Submitted by Kate Connolly, Senior Policy Analyst
March 16th, 2026**

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

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

Youth programming has played a significant role throughout the history of New York City by engaging young people in programming that can expand their minds and opportunities, connecting families to other essential supports beyond after school, and helping youth navigate challenging times. It is crucial that New York City maintain and invest in its youth and community development programs to provide all New Yorkers with opportunities to learn, grow, play, and access resources and opportunities to better their lives.

Settlement houses have been community hubs for youth programming and community development for over a century, and ensure that community members have what they need to thrive. Settlement houses operate DYCD-funded programs in most neighborhoods of New York City. Collectively, they operate over 170 DYCD-funded after-school programs (COMPASS Elementary, SONYC, and COMPASS High), serving over 25,000 youth or 23% of all COMPASS/SONYC participants citywide. Settlement houses also operate half of all Cornerstone contracts, a third of all Beacon contracts, and 32 adult literacy programs. Additionally, they serve over 27,000 participants annually through DYCD-funded youth workforce programs, a total of 7% of all SYEP participants. Settlement houses are also providers under DYCD's Office of Neighborhood Safety Programming, Immigrant Support programs, and Runaway and Homeless Youth services. Under the purview of ACS, settlement houses operate 7 Family Enrichment

Centers. While these programs play a crucial role in supporting children and families, they have often been underfunded and overlooked.

This testimony will focus on recommendations to support and stabilize citywide youth services in FY27 and strengthen the human services workforce including:

- Pilot an alternative summer program model for middle schoolers;
- Invest \$18 million in City Council funds for Adult Literacy services that sustains programs not eligible for funding under DYCD's Adult Literacy RFP;
- Restore and baseline the Promise NYC program with a \$50 million annual investment; and
- Protect Cornerstone Community Centers through infrastructure accountability.

Pilot an Alternative Summer Program Model for Middle School Youth

Although the FY27 Preliminary Budget has restored funding for summer programming, there is still more work that must be done to prepare for Summer 2026. In addition to tackling the operational issues that have plagued Summer Rising year after year, the City must work with local stakeholders to pilot summer program models other than Summer Rising. The Summer Rising model made sense when it was first created in Summer 2021, when students had been learning remotely for long periods of time during the COVID-19 pandemic and there were real concerns about learning loss and student readiness to return to school buildings long-term. However, we are now in a different time, and summer 2026 presents us with an exciting opportunity to begin to rethink and reshape summer programming to meet students' current needs.

In response to questions from settlement houses and their communities about the efficacy of this model, UNH conducted a study of Summer Rising, composed of a digital survey of 700 parents and CBO providers, and 7 focus groups of middle school participants. In November 2024, we released [*One Size Does Not Fit All: Assessing the Efficacy of the Summer Rising Program in Meeting the Needs of New York City Families*](#). Some of our key findings were:

1. Many families are dependent on free summer programming provided by the city. 58% of surveyed parents said they did not have a back-up option if Summer Rising was not available, with the percentage rising to 64% for low-income families.
2. Middle schoolers expressed frustration with the DOE-led academics. 87% of focus group participants disagreed or felt neutral in regards to the statement "I feel engaged in the morning session" of Summer Rising."
3. Despite recognizing the value of summer academic enrichment, many parents participating in the survey expressed frustration over a lack of communication around the DOE-led academic program. Parents reported being unclear about what curriculum was being used, who their students' teachers were, and if their child's learning needs were being met. This was in contrast to reports of regular communication from the CBO staff.
4. There are widespread concerns whether students with IEPs and English Language Learners are receiving appropriate accommodations. Over half of CBO staff said that a shortage of paraprofessional support for students with IEPs was one of the most pressing challenges. Additionally, some focus group participants who identify as English

Language Learners shared that they were excluded from the DOE-led academic portion and given arts & crafts projects instead.

Last year, the Department of Education released the Summer Rising 2024 Impact Analysis, which used spring 2024 and fall 2024 standardized academic data to compare the academic performance of young people who participated in Summer Rising to those who did not participate in the program. From this data, we can see that middle school participants who attended Summer Rising programming for 20+ days saw no statistically significant impact on their Math scores. Furthermore, when compared to other students in the City, middle school Summer Rising participants who attended Summer Rising programming for 20+ days actually fared worse in reading scores than the comparison group. DOE's own impact analysis supports our findings that Summer Rising is not the appropriate model for all middle school youth.

The summer months offer young people a break from the traditional school schedule, and allow more time for outside play, postsecondary exploration, field trips, positive peer socialization, and hands-on learning activities. Higher-income families often have the option to pick from different summer options depending on their child's preference, but most low-income families are reliant on city-funded programs to ensure a safe summer placement.

There exist a number of respected summer programming models that be used as a basis for alternative models, including:

- COMPASS Summer: DYCD funds community-based and Cornerstone programs to operate non-Summer Rising programming during summer months. This model reflects school-year programming and includes field trips, physical activity, leadership development, and integrated academics.
- Freedom Schools: This research-based and culturally sensitive program focuses on academics, civic engagement, family engagement, and social emotional learning. The training and model have been developed by the Children's Defense Fund.
- In addition, settlement houses operate a number of alternative summer models, including:
 - Life Lines Arts Camp: This program run by the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park engages youth in consistent group and community-building activities that promote social, physical, and artistic development. Campers attend a 5-day/week, full-day program and participate in enriching activities, including dance, theater, music, visual arts, and sports. Two full days per week are spent off-site on day trips.
 - Learning Campus Model: Henry Street Settlement operates this program as an extension of their school-year afterschool program, bringing together young people from two local community centers to participate in a club model. All students participate in academic sessions, but are given voice and choice to select enrichment activities, resulting in higher retention rates.

Youth and families should have a voice in deciding what kind of programming is right for them. **The City must commit to funding alternative summer programming models to meet the diverse needs of NYC's youth and families.**

Invest \$18 million in City Council funds for Adult Literacy services that sustains programs not eligible for funding under DYCD's Adult Literacy RFP.

UNH advocates for an adult literacy system that provides quality, comprehensive, and accessible educational services for New Yorkers to improve their literacy skills, learn English, obtain a High School Equivalency diploma, and enter training and post-secondary education.

In New York City, an estimated 2 million adults have limited English-language proficiency or lack a high school diploma. No-cost community-based adult literacy programs such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), adult basic education (ABE), and high school equivalency (HSE) preparation programs enable New Yorkers to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to secure higher-paying jobs that can sustain their families, support their children's education, and advocate for themselves and their families. Adult literacy programs run by settlement houses and other community-based organizations reach over 9,000 people each year and often serve as entry points for adult learners who are subsequently connected to workforce training support and other wraparound services that strengthen their families' economic and social well-being.

In FY25, the Department of Youth and Community Development's Adult Literacy RFP introduced new requirements tying program eligibility to specific Neighborhood Tabulation Areas (NTAs), which significantly limited which organizations could apply for funding. As a result, many long-standing providers were excluded from securing multi-year contracts and lost the funding needed to sustain their adult literacy programs.

To address the gaps created by the 2024 DYCD RFP, the City Council made a historic investment of \$16.5 million in adult literacy funding in FY25 and FY26. This discretionary funding is sustaining more than 60 programs. For four UNH settlement house adult literacy program providers (CAMBA, Center for Family Life, Queens Community House and Sunnyside Community Services), City Council discretionary funding is the sole funding source sustaining these programs, and they have served or expect to serve more than 3,100 students collectively. Without renewed funding, organizations excluded from the current DYCD literacy portfolio will not be able to offer adult literacy classes after June 30th of this year.

It is necessary for adult learners to have stable programs and support, as continued City Council funding supports staffing and essential program infrastructure and thousands of adult learners depend on these programs for essential skills. Ideally, these programs would be supported by a robust, baselined program managed by DYCD that offered students and providers stability with year-over-year funding. However, until DYCD revisits its unnecessarily restrictive stance on geographic priority for programming, **it is crucial that the City Council increases its investment to \$18 million to make sure that more adult learners can have access to quality classes.**

Restore and Baseline Promise NYC with a \$50 million Annual Investment

Under Promise NYC, four providers, including three settlement houses, have contracted with the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to implement a child care voucher program in each of their respective boroughs (NMIC in the Bronx and Manhattan, Center for Family Life in Brooklyn, Chinese-American Planning Council in Queens, and La Colmena in Staten Island). Since the program launched in FY23, providers have been reporting full enrollment and long waitlists, which demonstrates the need and desire from families to have this support.

Promise NYC was funded at \$25 million in the City's FY 2025 budget, and this investment helped clear waitlists across the program and expand access to child care for undocumented and mixed-status families who are otherwise excluded from most public child care programs. However, this funding was not baselined, and programs are now anticipating that child care services will end on June 30th, leaving families abruptly without care arrangements.

This year, we urge the City to both **baseline and increase funding for Promise NYC to \$50 million in the FY 2027 budget**. The success of the program has driven significant demand, and waitlists are growing as providers struggle to keep up with the number of eligible families seeking care. Additional investment would allow the program to serve more families and bring more providers into a model that has proven effective at connecting immigrant families to stable, affordable child care.

We celebrate that child care is receiving the attention and investment it deserves, and we strongly support efforts to expand access so that every child in New York City can benefit from early care and education, regardless of immigration status. However, experience shows that immigrant families are often the first to fall through the cracks when new systems are implemented or existing programs are expanded. Promise NYC has been successful precisely because it was designed to reach families who are otherwise excluded and to work closely with trusted community-based providers.

As the City works toward building a more inclusive and equitable child care system, it is critical to sustain and strengthen Promise NYC so immigrant families do not lose access to essential services during this transition. Maintaining and expanding this program ensures that families can continue accessing the child care they rely on today, while the City builds long-term systems that guarantee equitable access for all families.

Protect Cornerstone Community Centers Through Infrastructure Accountability

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

While providers do important work in their Cornerstone sites, the model itself is under-funded, causing considerable stress and creating unnecessary challenges for the nonprofit staff who are tasked with their operation. Like COMPASS/SONYC programs, Cornerstone contracts have been renewed with level funding for many years, leading to stagnant staff salaries and resulting challenges with recruitment and retention.

In addition, Cornerstone programs face additional challenges stemming from failing NYCHA infrastructure. NYCHA developments have faced historical neglect and severe under-funding for the last half-century, leading to modern conditions of dilapidation and disrepair. Community

centers are not exempt from these challenges, and providers struggle to get NYCHA or DYCD to respond quickly to repair needs within their centers, from leaks that could cause mold; peeling paint that could lead to lead exposure; and HVAC issues that result in high temperatures when the AC shuts off in the summer months.

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

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

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

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

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

The School Day Is Not Enough

Good afternoon Members of the Council,

My name is Joshua Castillo, and I am the Youth Services Coordinator with **VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired**, a nonprofit that has served New Yorkers who are blind or have low vision for nearly 100 years. VISIONS provides rehabilitation services, youth development programs, assistive technology training, and independence-building services for thousands of children, adults, and older New Yorkers across the five boroughs and Long Island.

I am here today to urge you to increase funding for after-school and out-of-school youth services in New York City, specifically for youth who are blind, visually impaired, and often living with additional disabilities.

As a former employee of the New York City Department of Education, I have seen firsthand what happens inside the classroom. Teachers are dedicated. Related service providers work tirelessly. Schools are doing the best they can with the time and resources they have. But the reality is this: the school day is focused on academic standards.

For many young people, the school day ends at 2:30 or 3:00 p.m. But for students with visual impairments, learning does not and cannot fit neatly into those hours.

The typical school day is designed to meet academic benchmarks. It is not structured to fully address the complex, layered needs of students who must simultaneously master academics, adaptive technology, orientation and mobility, independent living skills, social communication, and career readiness.

A visually impaired student may need to learn how to navigate public transportation safely. They may need intensive instruction in assistive technology just to complete homework. They may need structured opportunities to build social confidence in a world that is often not designed with them in mind.

Youth who are visually impaired—especially those with additional disabilities—require repetition, individualized instruction, and real-world practice. These skills cannot be mastered in isolation or in limited time blocks squeezed into an already packed school day. They require consistent, specialized programming beyond school hours.

That is where organizations like VISIONS play a critical role. Through after-school and out-of-school programming, we provide young people with hands-on training in mobility, assistive technology, independent living skills, and career exploration. We help students practice the real-world skills that allow them to travel independently, prepare meals, manage finances, advocate for accommodations, and build meaningful peer relationships.

These are not “extras.” They are foundational life skills that determine whether a young person with vision loss will grow into an independent adult.

But we also know that these skills should not be treated as optional or left only to community programs. **Vision rehabilitation services—such as assistive technology instruction, and independent living skills—must be recognized as essential educational supports.** We encourage the Council to work with the Department of Education and state partners to ensure these services are appropriately included and funded through students’ Individualized Education Programs, so that students who need them can receive them consistently and equitably.

Without these services, the gap widens. Students fall behind not because they lack potential, but because they lack access. Families are left to navigate complex systems alone. And young people who could become confident, contributing members of our workforce instead face isolation and limited opportunity.

But when we invest intentionally, the outcomes are transformative.

I’ve seen students learn to navigate public transportation independently, prepare meals, advocate for accommodations, manage a bank account, apply for jobs, and begin to envision real careers. These are the skills that turn potential into independence.

New York City has long been a leader in diversity, equity, and inclusion. Yet equity requires targeted investment. Youth with visual impairments, particularly those with additional disabilities, require specialized programming, trained staff, adaptive equipment, and small group instruction. These services cost more to provide, but the cost of not providing them is far greater.

Increased funding for after-school and out-of-school services is not charity. It is workforce development. It is community safety. It is public health. It is a commitment to ensuring that disability does not determine destiny.

Our young people are capable. They are ambitious. They are resilient. What they need is opportunity: a structured, sustained, and properly funded opportunity.

I respectfully ask this Council to prioritize expanded funding for after-school and out-of-school programming and to support policies that ensure vision rehabilitation services are fully integrated into the educational supports available to students with visual impairments.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to the youth of our great city.



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TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA-GREATER NEW YORK THE NEW YORK CITY COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARINGS MARCH 19, 2026

Introduction and Thanks

My name is Anisee Alves-Willis, Program Director for Youth Build, Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY). We are the local affiliate of the national organization, Volunteers of America, Inc. (VOA). I would like to thank Chair Stevens and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

About Us

VOA-GNY is an anti-poverty organization that aims to end homelessness in Greater New York through housing, health and wealth building services. We are one of the region's oldest and largest human service providers, founded 130 years ago and serving more than 12,000 adults and children annually through 70+ programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester and thousands more via our Operation Backpack® initiative. We are also an active nonprofit developer of supportive and affordable housing, with a robust portfolio of permanent supportive housing, affordable and senior housing properties—with more in the pipeline. At VOA-GNY, housing is just the start of what we do. While we are known as a provider of shelter and housing, our wealth building services are core to our work. By assisting New Yorkers with education and training programs that help them build careers, we can interrupt the cycle of homelessness before it starts and set young people on a path to economic stability and security.

Testimony:

Thank you to Chair Stevens and Members of the Committee on Children and Youth for your unwavering leadership and commitment to all New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, housing instability, and poverty, and for your unquestioning dedication to nonprofit providers like VOA-GNY who have answered the city's call to help our neighbors stabilize and thrive within our communities.

VOA-GNY's YouthBuild program located in Washington Heights serves young people ages 17 to 24 who are out of school and out of work, supporting them in completing their education and accessing pathways to employment in high-demand sectors.

We are proud members of the NYC YouthBuild Collaborative and write to strongly support the continuation of YouthBuild funding and to urge the Council to:

Restore the NYC YouthBuild Initiative funding to \$2.1 million, consistent with FY23 levels.

At VOA-GNY YouthBuild our program focuses on sustainable career pathways in construction for young adults ages 17-24. We currently serve 66 young people annually from Washington Heights, Tremont, Highbridge, Morris Heights and Mott Haven, including youth from Council Districts 8, 10, 14, 15, 16 and 17.

Our participants face significant barriers, including housing instability, food insecurity, justice system involvement, and limited access to educational opportunities. Despite this, our young people demonstrate resilience and strong commitment to building better futures.

Over the past year, our program has:

Supported 23 young people in earning their GED or advancing academically

Helped participants earn 33 industry-recognized credentials

Placed 6 graduates into employment, with wages ranging from [\$21–\$25/hour]

One of our recent graduates, NC, exemplifies what determination and hard work can achieve. Enrolled in January 2025, she earned her NCCER Core certification, OSHA 30, and 10-Hour Site Safety Training by April, followed by her GED in November 2025. By January 2026, she had secured full-time employment with VOA-GNY.

Beyond her own accomplishments, NC became a pillar of support for her peers — tutoring classmates, sharing study strategies, and lifting spirits when others felt discouraged. She has truly transformed her hardships into strength, and we couldn't be more proud of everything she has achieved.

This is the impact of YouthBuild.

Our model is intensive and high-touch, combining education, workforce training, leadership development, and wraparound services. This level of support is essential for young people who have been disconnected from traditional systems.

City Council funding allows us to provide stipends, deliver hands-on training, and offer the case management necessary for young people to succeed.

Without restored funding, programs like ours will face difficult decisions about reducing services or limiting enrollment. With it, we can continue to expand access and deepen our

impact.

We respectfully urge the Council to restore NYC YouthBuild Initiative funding to \$2.1 million in the FY27 budget.

Thank you for your continued leadership and commitment to New York City's young people.

Testimony respectfully submitted by Anisee Alves-Willis. For more information, please contact me at aalves-willis@voa-gny.org.



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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

**Testimony of YMCA of Greater New York
Submitted Chelsea Baytemur, Director, Policy and Advocacy**

**New York City Council Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 16, 2026**

I respectfully submit the following testimony on behalf of the YMCA of Greater New York. We thank Speaker Menin, Chair Lee, Chair Stevens, and the entire City Council for their time today and their partnership in fighting to secure critical investments in the Fiscal Year 2027 budget.

The YMCA of Greater New York is committed to empowering youth, improving health, and strengthening community. With 24 YMCA branches and more than 100 community sites across New York City, the YMCA is among the largest providers of human services spanning from infancy to older adults and an important anchor, convener, and catalyst for transformational change in underserved communities. The YMCA is also a proud member of the Campaign for Children (C4C) and the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL). As members of these coalitions, we support their policy and budget agendas.

We applaud Mayor Mamdani and his Administration for including historic investments to expand 2-K and 3-K. This achievement reflects not only the collaborative partnership between the Administration and the City Council, but also the dedication of families and early childhood providers across the city. The Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Plan also includes historic baseline funding for summer programming, ensuring that children have access to year-round learning and enrichment opportunities. While this truly is a historic moment, we must in good faith urge the Administration to protect and invest in a continuum of care that supports children, youth, and families from birth to 12th grade. This means fully funded holistic out of school time services for our school age students. Early childhood programs and out of school time services work in tandem to support the development of children, all while enabling families to balance work and caregiving responsibilities.

The YMCA Afterschool program, which includes seven Beacon, eight SONYC, twenty-six COMPASS, ten Community Schools, and two Cornerstone sites, empowers nearly 15,000 children and teens each day. The YMCA plays a vital role in helping young people build on the academic

knowledge they gain during school hours while also fostering social-emotional growth, strengthening peer relationships, and boosting confidence. These critical skills empower youth to thrive both within our program sites and beyond. For countless New York City families, after-school programs like ours are not just an enrichment opportunity, they are an essential part of their support system. High-quality after-school programs combat learning loss, promote social-emotional development, prepare youth for the workforce, and provide affordable care that working families depend on.

In addition to our school-year programs, the YMCA also plays a central role in summer youth development through our Summer Rising partnership. At the YMCA, summer camp is one of our most cherished and successful programs. Last summer alone, over 17,000 children participated across our 67 camp sites, including 5,641 Summer Rising participants. To support this effort, we employed 1,200 camp counselors and 685 participants from the Summer Youth Employment Program. These numbers represent more than data—they reflect children learning, growing, and thriving in safe, supportive environments. For this reason, we strongly urge the City Council and the Mamdani Administration to work together to ensure the timely release of COMPASS and SONYC RFP awards, enabling uninterrupted services for children and youth and affordable care for families.

We also urge the City to address the operational challenges faced by community-based organizations as they work to deliver high-quality early childhood education, afterschool, and summer programs. This includes establishing clear and consistent channels of communication between DOE and DYCD—particularly to support our most vulnerable students and ensure access to related services—expanding family-centered, community-driven enrollment strategies, guaranteeing timely payments to providers to prevent program disruptions, and investing in the childcare workforce, the backbone of the system, who have long been undervalued and underpaid. We call on the Mayor and City Council to prioritize investments in universal early childhood, childcare, and youth services. Strengthening this continuum of care ensures that every child can access high-quality programs, the workforce is fairly compensated, and families across New York City can work, thrive, and contribute fully to the city’s economy.

Budget Recommendations for Youth Services:

- Announce the COMPASS/SONYC RFP Awards. Eliminate waitlists for early childhood, afterschool, and summer programs.
- Expand services for children with disabilities, English Language Learners, students in foster care, and children in temporary housing. Providing year-round programming, extended-day options, and inclusive, multilingual outreach.
- Ensure timely payment and full funding for human service nonprofits, including past debts.
- Fully fund indirect costs and cost escalators to reflect the true cost of delivering services.
- Provide pay parity for early childhood and youth development staff to attract and retain skilled professionals. Include annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) in all contracts to prevent future erosion of wages and operating budgets.
- Coordinated data systems and clear inter-agency communication

- Correctly roll out the promised 2000 2k slots, and fix existing ECE issues
- Increase and baseline \$50 million for Promise NYC to provide additional seats for infants and toddlers ages 0-2 without eligibility requirements.
- Work with OCFS to address the waitlist for the Child Care Assistance Program

Adult Literacy

More than 2.2 million adults in New York City have limited English proficiency or lack a high school diploma. Of those in need of adult literacy services, approximately 1.7 million are immigrants, who also make up more than 75% of current adult literacy students. The YMCA has worked with newcomers to NYC since 1908, back when we had a YMCA on Ellis Island. Based on the success of our English Language and Employment Services for Adult Immigrant and Refugees program, which was established in 1978, we launched the New Americans Initiative in 2008. Pre-pandemic the initiative was operating out of seven New Americans Welcome Centers at various YMCA branches. We currently offer services at four sites – Chinatown, Flatbush, Flushing, and Harlem, as well as online classes, serving over 1,000 students.

The YMCA's New Americans Initiative is dedicated to improving the quality of life for immigrant learners across New York City through English language classes, workforce certification and training opportunities, and trauma-informed support. Our programs provide instructional, vocational, recreational, and wraparound services designed to meet the diverse and individualized needs of our participants. Through comprehensive case management, we support not only our students but also their families, offering holistic assistance both inside and outside the classroom. We work to remove barriers to learning by connecting participants with critical resources such as food assistance, housing support, citizenship services, health and mental health care, childcare, continuing education, and immigration legal services. At the YMCA, demand for adult literacy classes far exceeds the number of seats we can offer at two of our locations, Harlem and Flatbush, leaving many prospective students on waitlists; increased funding would allow us to hire additional teachers, expand classroom capacity, and ensure more New Yorkers can access these critical learning opportunities.

Of the total funding for services in NYC, \$24 million comes from the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. However, this funding is increasingly at risk. The Trump administration previously called for the complete elimination of WIOA Title II funding in the FY26 federal budget and may attempt to do so again in FY27. At the same time, the administration is seeking to exclude students from federally funded adult literacy classes based on their immigration status. According to the Literacy Assistance Center, losing this funding would eliminate over 20,000 seats for students in dire need of these services. The YMCA has WIOA IET program at our Flushing Branche, where a loss in federal funding would result in a loss of 200 seats. Despite growing threats from the federal government, city and State investment in adult education remains deeply inadequate.

Each year, fewer than 3% of New Yorkers in need can access Adult Basic Education (ABE), High School Equivalency (HSE), or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. In turn, the vast majority of those seeking these opportunities—low-income and working-class immigrants, women, and people of color—are effectively shut out of the education and workforce pathways

that could help them build more stable futures for themselves and their families. Many prospective students are placed on long waitlists and must wait months—or even years—for a seat to open due to limited funding, not enough teachers, and a lack of available classroom space.

While we appreciate that the Preliminary Budget maintains adult literacy services at their current baseline, we urge Mayor Mamdani to go further and support New Yorkers by investing \$20 million in a new city adult education funding stream, Education for Integration and Equity. This investment would expand access to English language learning, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency, and civics classes for immigrant New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status. Expanding adult literacy services is especially urgent at a time when demand continues to grow and our immigrant communities face increasing uncertainty and barriers to opportunity.

Adult literacy is not just an education issue, it is a matter of racial, social, and economic justice. Literacy empowers individuals to understand and advocate for their rights, access vital resources and opportunities, engage in civic life, and uplift their communities. Investing in adult literacy is an investment in equity, economic mobility, and the future of New York City. Now is the time to take bold action and ensure that every adult can learn, grow, and thrive.

Budget Recommendations for Adult Literacy:

- Invest \$20 million to support the creation of a new city adult education funding stream, Education for Integration and Equity.
- For the City Council to increase its Discretionary funding for Adult Literacy programs from \$14.5 million to \$18 million and to consolidate the two initiatives into one Adult Literacy Forward. Increasing the funding by \$3.5 million would enable these programs and potentially others to serve thousands more adults in need. Consolidating all programs under Adult Literacy Forward would streamline the system, create uniform requirements for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs, and enable the City Council to have immediate access to all the data on services and outcomes for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs through the Council-funded NYC RISE data collection system.

If you have any questions, please contact Chelsea Baytemur, Director of Policy and Advocacy, at cbaytemur@ymcanyc.org.



Testimony of Youth Action Programs and Homes Inc./Youth Action YouthBuild Program
Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing – Committee on Children and Youth

March 18, 2027

Dear Chair Althea Stevens and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget.

My name is Robert Taylor and I am the Executive Director of Youth Action Programs and Homes Inc. which runs a YouthBuild program located in Manhattan's East Harlem neighborhood. We serve out of school and out of work young people ages 17 to 24 who are primarily from the neighborhoods of Harlem and the S. Bronx, , supporting them in completing their education and accessing pathways to employment in high-demand sectors.

We are proud members of the NYC YouthBuild Collaborative and write to strongly support the continuation of YouthBuild funding and to urge the Council to:

Restore the NYC YouthBuild Initiative funding to \$2.1 million, consistent with FY23 levels.

At Youth Action YouthBuild, our program focuses on providing Opportunity Youth construction skills training, building operations, and Food Sector jobs training along with in demand certifications, paid work experience and job placement support for up to a year after graduation. We currently serve 18 young people, down from 40 in FY 2024. We primarily serve young people from the neighborhoods of Harlem and the South Bronx (District 8).

The reduction in our service numbers this year is tied to a number of factors all converging at the same time. As a DOL-funded YouthBuild program ending its current contract, we were not able to secure supplemental program funds for a full cohort this year due to delays in the Federal government releasing an updated Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA). The FOA was finally released this January well after our current program cycle start. Additionally, funding that we had anticipated from NYC Council's YouthBuild Initiative was cut by nearly half the recommended amount that the NYC YouthBuild Collaborative had forwarded to the City for review. The reduced funding was also determined because non-YouthBuild programs has received funding under the Council's YB Initiative allocation. In spite of the funding reductions experienced this year, Youth Action has been able to run a reduced version of the program as we see that the need is great amongst young people in our community, particularly amongst those

young people who are not in school and are not currently working or are under employed. This is a segment of our population that is often left out of needed support. Our hope in the coming fiscal year is that we will be able to increase our service numbers as we have re-applied for DOL funding and anticipate a decision by June of 2026. We are also hoping that the City Council would reinstate FY 23 funding levels to the YouthBuild Initiative so that YouthBuild programs such as our can have a chance at sustaining their work and meeting the needs of the community's out of school youth. Our participants face significant barriers, including housing instability, food insecurity, justice system involvement, and limited access to educational opportunities. Despite this, our young people demonstrate resilience and strong commitment to building better futures.

Over the past year, our program has:

- Supported 18 young people in earning their GED or advancing academically
- Helped participants earn 30 industry-recognized credentials
- Placed 8 graduates into employment, with wages ranging from [\$18–\$25/hour]

One of our recent graduates, Braidon S. entered our program at 17 after struggling with traditional high school and the lure of the streets. Over his nine months in the program, Brandon located his true North – earning his GED shortly after turning 18, identifying a vocational calling that could help direct his future choices – Building Operations and energy efficient housing. Brandon has renewed his commitment to continuing his education after obtaining his GED, he is now working and applying to BMCC. While in the YouthBuild program, Brandon was elected President of our Youth Policy Council and he had a number of opportunities to engage with his community as a positive-minded youth leader. Brandon's experience is representative of the types of journey's a young person undergoes when enrolling in a YouthBuild program – they discover a sense of their self-worth; awaken aspirations for a better future and be part of a connected community of peers supported by caring adults who reflect their communities. This is the impact of YouthBuild.

Our model is intensive and high-touch, combining education, workforce training, leadership development, and wraparound services. This level of support is essential for young people who have been disconnected from traditional systems.

City Council funding allows us to provide stipends, deliver hands-on training, and offer the case management necessary for young people to succeed.

Without restored funding, programs like ours will face difficult decisions about reducing services or limiting enrollment. With it, we can continue to expand access and deepen our impact.

We respectfully urge the Council to restore NYC YouthBuild Initiative funding to \$2.1 million in the FY27 budget.

Thank you for your continued leadership and commitment to New York City's young people.

Sincerely,

Robert Taylor
Robert Taylor
Executive Director

Youth Action Programs and Homes Inc./Youth Action YouthBuild (YSYB)

206 East 118th Street,

New York, NY 10035



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March 13, 2026

Youth Justice Network City Council Testimony

Good afternoon to the members of the Council and to all community partners present. On behalf of Youth Justice Network, I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today.

My name is Messiah Ramkisson and I serve as the Deputy Executive Director of Youth Justice Network formerly known as Friends of Island Academy; a 35-year existing non-profit organization founded on the school floor of Rikers Island with a mission rooted in crisis intervention and wrap around support for teens and young adults impacted by punitive systems of incarceration.

Our citywide youth advocacy model serves as the bridge between young people returning home to marginalized communities within the five boroughs of New York City and their respective needs to support healthier lives and sustainable pathways. The thesis of my message focuses on the importance of accessibility as it relates to intervention and resources and the needed investment to support such infrastructure within the neighborhoods our young people call home.

Our work at Youth Justice Network prioritizes proximity and tangibility as two critical components to eradicate cycles of recidivism, but most importantly providing doorways to opportunities that can empower healthier outcomes. In 2016 we created a system of aftercare called the Youth Reentry Network which was catalyzed by our youth advocacy model. This Network ensured that every young person entering the doors of New Admissions within Rikers was attached to a youth advocate from the first day of incarceration to the day of release. Inclusive of but not limited to outcomes around housing and employment, education and mental health; the youth plans created with young people and their advocates during detention were actualized immediately upon discharge.

We've learned that young people are more responsive to a model built on trust rather than one built on mandate. In partnership with the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and the Department of Corrections, we implemented this initiative within four facilities on Rikers which housed

teens and young adults of all genders. Our services also followed our adolescents who were transferred to ACS custody post Raise The Age. However due to unexpected yet impactful COVID budget cuts, we were coerced into a 70 percent lay off of staff. I must also add that due to the pandemic, the jails also shut their doors to all service providers; removing this lifeline of support from our young people. We knew that this was the worse time for youth coming from inequitable conditions and communities to be disconnected from the urgent support systems that ensured their wellness and success. This resulted in our innovation and creation of Shifting Gears, a mobile resource center which drives into a different borough each day of the week delivering our resources directly to the doorstep of the neighborhoods that our youth come to. Our bus is equipped with an outreach team of credible messengers and also an army of advocates tied to each borough.

We have seen impactful engagement with over 65% percent enrollments for services and supports from youth and young adults who meet us on the “block”. We understand the investment of police presence in these community zones throughout New York City. We also understand that meaningful change can only occur if the same or greater investment is filtered into the organizations providing culturally connected and meaningful intervention within these spaces.

We thank you for your time and hope that you honor these words as an urgent call to action for greater intentionality and investment into the change that’s needed for youth who are often forgotten and held accountable for conditions they did not create but rather inherited from birth. Thank you again for your time and attention today.



Messiah Ramkissoon
Deputy Executive Director, Youth Justice Network

**New York City Council
Committee on Children & Youth
Preliminary Budget Hearing – Children & Youth
Written Testimony of Youth Represent
March 16, 2026**

Youth Represent is dedicated to improving the lives and futures of young people impacted by the criminal legal system. When the legal system creates barriers to success for youth, we use the law to help them leave the stigma of a criminal record behind. We provide criminal and civil reentry legal representation to young people aged 16-26, assisting them with everything from rap sheet review to school suspensions to employment discrimination and other legal needs they identify. We also engage in policy advocacy and youth leadership development through our Youth Committee and the Youth Justice & Opportunities Act (YJ&O) Campaign.

Thank you to Chair Stevens, Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams, Committee members, and staff for the opportunity to testify today about the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027.

New York City Must Invest in Resources and Opportunities for Young People - Not Criminalization

Across New York City's five boroughs, an estimated 32,215 young people under 25—primarily Black and Brown youth—were drawn into the justice system through arrests, convictions, and incarceration in 2025.¹ This is a cycle that will not stop if the City continues to pour money into criminalizing, surveilling, and incarcerating young people before they've had the chance to thrive. Instead, the City must continually invest in community-oriented, youth-specific resources and opportunities to keep New York families safe and healthy. These programmatic and investment priorities are outlined in the 2025 [Landscape of Youth Services for Young People with Juvenile and/or Criminal Legal System Involvement](#) ("Landscape Report") which we are proud to have co-created with the NYC Youth Justice Coalition.

Next year will mark the tenth anniversary of the passage of New York's landmark Raise the Age (RTA) law, which ended the shameful chapter in our history of prosecuting 16- and 17-year olds as adults regardless of offense. Prior to the passage of this legislation, 16- and 17-year-olds were held in dangerous conditions on Rikers Island and other adult jails across the state. Moreover, these youth were systematically locked-out of age-appropriate services in family court

¹ NYS Arrests by County.

https://mypublicdashboard.ny.gov/t/OJRP_PUBLIC/views/NYSArrestsbyCounty/CurrentData?%3Aembed=y&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y. Accessed 18 Mar. 2026.

NYPD Arrest Data (Year to Date) | NYC Open Data.

https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Public-Safety/NYPD-Arrest-Data-Year-to-Date-/uip8-fykc/about_data. Accessed 18 Mar. 2026.

programs designed to meet the needs of adolescents and avoid the barriers of an adult criminal record.

Despite making up half of the state's youth justice system population, New York City's young people have been excluded from accessing the Raise the Age funding since the law was enacted because the City exceeds the tax cap prescribed by state law. When RTA was enacted in 2017, the state budget both excluded New York City from Raise the Age funding *and* ended cost-sharing for the Close to Home program, placing the full financial, programmatic, and administrative burden of both youth justice programs on New York City alone.

Despite the lack of state funds, New York City made substantial investments in youth justice programming to support Raise the Age implementation as well as older youth and emerging adults, with emphasis on programs that utilized credible messenger mentoring, like ARCHES and AIM, and on alternatives to incarceration and detention.² During the Adams administration, many of these programs saw reduced funding or were cut entirely. Among these were programs that provided critical violence prevention and reentry services to youth.

Despite significant gaps in funding and services, youth arrests continue to decrease. Yet Crossroads and Horizons, the youth detention facilities that absorbed the custody of 16 and 17 year olds in the City, are dangerously overcrowded. Between July and September 2025, there were 329 youth detained in NYC's Secure Detention Centers,³ despite the maximum bed capacity fluctuating between 212 and 259.⁴ For over two years, ACS has been operating under a waiver from the Office of Children and Family Services which allows the agency to circumvent the state law that mandates private bedrooms for youth in secure detention. Under this waiver, young people have been sleeping on cots in hallways and classrooms at Horizon and Crossroads. Temporarily adding beds and continually renewing this waiver is a band-aid that does not adequately or sustainably address overcrowding. The time to consider and act on alternatives is now.

The total admissions to Secure Detention and Specialized Secure Detention increased by 24% from October 2024 to September 2025.⁵ In 2025, 60% of youth in secure detention were Black, and 31% were Hispanic, as published by NYC's Administration of Children Services Detention Demographic Report from FY 2026 Q1.⁶ Black and Brown young people are disproportionately impacted by this overcrowding because they are disproportionately represented in NYC's Secure Detention population.

² Making Raise the Age Work for New York City Youth. Community Justice Collaborative, Oct. 2018. https://mcusercontent.com/9c2de0514632a20b91f239a8c/files/2df86e9d-b229-4fe5-8707-788cf7f59835/raise_the_age.pdf.

³ "Flash Report - Monthly Indicators." NYC Administration for Children's Services, January 2025. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/flashReports/2025/01.pdf>.

⁴ Juvenile Detention Facilities - SD/SSD Census | Bureau of Detention Services | Office of Children and Family Services. <https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/youth/detention/census.php>. Accessed 18 Mar. 2026.

⁵ *Quarterly Detention Demographics Report*. Fiscal Year 2026 4th Quarter. New York City Administration for Children's Services, <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2026/detention-demographic-q1.pdf>.

⁶ *ibid.*

ACS does not provide adequate data to accurately represent the kinds and severity of charges faced by young people held in Secure Detention in NYC. More granular data on arrest charges by borough would better guide allocation of resources to specific programs in the places they are most needed. This lack of data obstructs any effort to understand the problem of overcrowding in these facilities and to develop a comprehensive decarceration plan to identify young people in each borough who could be released with supervision or moved to Alternative to Detention (ATD) / Alternative to Incarceration (ATI) programs while their case is open.

This is not an easy problem to solve. Many youth in Secure Detention and Specialized Secure Detention face serious charges in adult court as Adolescent Offenders and Juvenile Offenders. Substantially reducing the number of youth in detention will require a comprehensive plan and substantial investment of resources to provide robust ATD and ATI services to youth in every borough and to reduce youth arrests for serious offenses. In addition to the need for adequate services, the City has never fully reckoned with the impact of COVID on youth - the adolescents and emerging adults with the deepest system involvement today were in elementary, middle and high school during the height of the pandemic, and experienced learning loss, peer disconnection, and service disruption not to mention the trauma of family illness and death.

The City Must Implement a Comprehensive Decarceration Plan

Too often, young people only gain access to the services and supports they need *after* they have already been arrested or are in crisis. Instead of building systems that proactively meet young people where they are, we wait until they have contact with the legal system before mobilizing resources. At that point, service organizations are asked to do the incredibly difficult work of wrapping a young person in supports while also confronting the deeper challenges that may have led to system involvement in the first place—poverty, trauma, unmet educational needs, housing instability, and lack of economic opportunity.

Across New York City, the organizations entrusted with serving young people are asked to meet increasingly complex needs while operating with exceptionally limited resources. City contracts for youth services remain significantly underfunded compared to adult service contracts—contracts that are themselves insufficient—creating persistent challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff and maintaining the continuity of care that young people need to thrive. These constraints are particularly acute as we better understand the profound impacts of mental health challenges and trauma among youth; hiring and retaining clinical professionals capable of responding to these needs requires meaningful and sustained investment.

If young people are truly our future, then we must invest in them now—by strengthening community-based services, ensuring youth providers are adequately resourced, expanding access to economic opportunity, and building a coordinated system that meets young people where they are. The [Landscape Report](#) provides a roadmap for a fully-funded, sustainable continuum of services that includes prevention, alternatives to incarceration and detention, and reentry.

Incarcerating Youth *DOES NOT* Work:

To address the overcrowding crisis and successfully redirect and depopulate Secure Detention, **the City must expand investments in youth-specific ATDs and ATIs, especially for felony charges.** We know that incarceration has disastrous effects on youth outcomes: residential placements and incarceration create obstacles to psychosocial development, making it harder for youth to learn to control impulsive and aggressive behavior, function autonomously, take responsibility for their behavior, and consider other points of view. Research indicates that confining young people increases the probability of recidivism as an adult by between 20-30%. Studies support the diversion of young people away from settings that confine them as soon as possible; for even a short period of custody has lifelong detrimental physical and mental health effects.

In response to the wealth of research that underscores the detriments of incarcerating youth, we challenge the New York City Council to adopt the goal of reaching a policy of “zero youth detention,” as described in the [Landscape Report](#). This is a widely supported goal across jurisdictions and among young people, families, service providers and advocates. “By scaling a continuum of community-based responses, New York City can provide strength-based, effective solutions that help youth remain safely in their homes and communities.”⁷

Programs and Services Tailored to Young People *DO* Work:

Program models like credible messenger mentoring, family-focused multidimensional and cognitive behavioral therapy, Restorative Justice interventions targeting youth, and wraparound programs with assigned care coordinators use evidence-backed strategies to keep young people out of carceral settings and improve public safety.

Locally-designed programs can work even better than the program models listed above. “Homegrown” programs, as the Sentencing Project refers to them, that can offer a range of supports that can achieve real success with the young people in their communities when they incorporate these factors into their work:

- a trusted mentor, advocate, therapist or care coordinator who provides ongoing support and encouragement;
- rigorous and well-designed cognitive behavioral therapies;
- close cooperation with, and support for, young people’s families; and

⁷ Landscape of Youth Services for Young People with Juvenile and/or Criminal Legal Systems Involvement. New York City Youth Justice Coalition, 2025, <https://www.lac.org/assets/images/Landscape-of-Youth-Services-for-Young-People-with-Juvenile-and-or-Criminal-Legal-Systems-Involvement.pdf>.

- constructive education, employment, and recreational or community service activities.⁸

Data indicates that more non-profits targeting community needs, like those that use the strategies listed above, the more crime rates go down in that community.⁹ There are excellent youth providers in communities all over New York City that already incorporate these strategies and models into their programs, but the State’s investment in them is a fraction of what it spends on surveilling, policing, and incarcerating young people. The work that actually reduces youth incarceration is already happening on the ground and in our communities and needs to be adequately funded.

Snapshot of NYC Youth Justice Programs:

Drive Change supports justice-involved young people by providing culinary and hospitality training, social support, and pathways to advance their economic mobility and overall well-being. Through their fellowship program designed for 18-25 year olds, Drive Change offers a three-month paid learning and skill-building program where fellows gain skills to support life, workplace, and emotional well-being on their path to becoming agents of change. The fellowship has a 74% graduation rate and works with 60 justice-involved young people per year.

Why it works: Drive Change’s workforce programming is in the culinary arts because they believe that hospitality can serve as a tool for social justice; quality employment is critical to disrupting the cycle of incarceration, poverty, and intergenerational trauma.

exalt youth works with justice-involved youth aged 15–19 at various intercept points. The program focuses on reconnections to education, career readiness and key life skills, followed by a nine-week paid internship. With structured classes, one-on-one support, paid work experience, and a strong alumni network, exalt gives young people the tools they need to stay on track and believe in their potential. Two years post-graduation from the program, 95% of exalt’s young people have not been rearrested and 98% are re-engaged with education and scheduled to graduate high school or with an equivalency diploma by 20-years old.

Why it works: exalt youth provides structured support to learn key life skills while reconnecting youth to the community, giving them the tools and motivation for achievement while avoiding arrest and incarceration.

Arches Transformative Mentoring program works with 16- to 24-year-olds on probation who are disconnected from school, work, and programs and at high risk of rearrest, involving group activities and sessions based on cognitive behavioral

⁸ Mendel, Richard. “Effective Alternatives to Youth Incarceration.” The Sentencing Project, 28 June 2023, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/effective-alternatives-to-youth-incarceration/>.

⁹ “Ideas in Action: More Non-Profits, Fewer Crimes.” Vital City, 28 Mar. 2023, <https://www.vitalcitynyc.org/more-non-profits-fewer-crimes/>.

interventions run by credible messenger mentors, and individual mentoring to set positive goals. Arches participants were found to be less than half as likely as a matched comparison group to be convicted of a new felony 12 months and 24 months after beginning probation.

Why it works: Arches participants work with trusted mentors to develop conflict resolution skills and change thinking patterns; build new, healthy relationships with adults and peers; and identify goals.

CASES gives young people a chance to succeed as independent members of the community by providing mental health, mentorship, workforce readiness, and education services for young people who are involved or at risk of involvement with the criminal legal system. Its alternative-to-incarceration program ROAR follows an evidence-based model for young adults aged 16-27 with a case in Criminal or Supreme Courts, where they receive personalized services including gun violence prevention. 90% of participants avoid rearrest while in the program. CHOICES, an alternative-to-detention program for 12–17-year-olds with a pending Family Court matter, allows participants to avoid placement in youth detention facilities while receiving family therapy, court and school liaison services, and connections to resources that combat the socioeconomic drivers of crime.

Why it works: CASES ATI and ATD services for youth invest in their potential, building the skills necessary to realize opportunities for success in their communities while avoiding the retraumatization of incarceration.

Investing in a robust continuum of services must be complemented by extensive reforms to NYC and NYS youth justice systems to reduce the city and state’s overreliance on incarceration and detention programs. At the City level, these reforms include:

- **Passage of #ErasetheDatabase (Int 0798 - Stevens)**

A local law that would abolish the NYPD’s criminal group database and prohibit the establishment of a successor database to reduce racial profiling and criminalization of Black and Brown people in NYC’s most under-resourced and over-policed neighborhoods.

- **Closing Rikers Island on time**

Over 1,300 young people aged 18-25 are currently being held in Rikers Island facilities. Rikers Island is deadly: under former Mayor Eric Adams, 48 people died in New York City jails or immediately upon release from Department of Correction custody, and this number is likely an underestimation.¹⁰ The plan to close Rikers

¹⁰ “Tracking Deaths in NYC Jails Since 2022.” Vera Institute of Justice, 7 July 2018, <https://www.vera.org/news/nyc-jail-deaths>.

must be accelerated to maximize every possible strategy to reduce the jail population and limit the number of people exposed to the harm and abuses of Rikers. The Mayor and city agencies must take the lead in urgently executing this plan, and every elected official must leverage their power to support its implementation.

At a cost of over half a million dollars per person per year, Rikers Island is the most expensive and least effective tool our City has to create safety. In addition to exposing people to rampant abuse and violence, Rikers Island wastes resources that are desperately needed for housing, treatment, education, and other investments. These funds must be directed to alternative-to-incarceration and reentry programs - including those that serve New York's most vulnerable young people - and to adequately fund supportive housing and community-based mental health treatment. These resources are essential for New Yorkers of all ages and are especially crucial for young people and families.

State Reforms

- **The passage of the Youth Justice Innovation Fund (A10264 - Romero / S643 - Cleare)**

The Youth Justice Innovation Fund would direct \$50 million to community-based organizations to provide a continuum of services from prevention, early intervention, to alternatives to detention, placement and incarceration for youth aged 12 through 25. The Innovation Fund builds on successful state-wide efforts like Project RISE, which has brought over \$30 million to communities to combat gun violence through public health strategies, including credible messenger and violence interruption programs.

- **Passage of the Youth Justice & Opportunities Act (A5293 - Walker / S4330A - Myrie)**

State legislation that would expand alternatives to incarceration, diversion, and immediate record sealing for young people who are arrested in New York. It recognizes that emerging adults—young people ages 18 to 25—have unique needs and tremendous potential. Rather than punishing risk-taking and mistakes with harsh sentencing and the barriers that accompany an adult criminal conviction, YJ&O provides for effective, age-appropriate interventions to move young people out of the criminal legal system and into education, stability, and economic opportunity.

- **The passage of #Right2RemainSilent: Children's Early Access to Counsel Legislation (A2620 - Hevesi / S878A - Bailey)**

State legislation that would protect children's right to remain silent by creating a non-waivable requirement for consultation with a lawyer for children under 18 before questioning by police.

Youth Represent: Critical Services for Youth

With support from the New York City Council through the Innovative Criminal Justice Programs Initiative and the Discharge Planning Initiative, Youth Represent provides reentry legal services for young people in their own communities. We are deliberate in serving Black, Latiné, Indigenous, and other youth of color who otherwise would not have access to legal services, while still prioritizing those with criminal legal system involvement. We have also expanded our age range from 24 and under to youth 26 and under. This is in response to growing research that shows our brains continue to develop into the mid-twenties, and addresses the very practical reality that our partner organizations often welcome participants over the age of 24.

We focus on young people living within New York City's five boroughs and are committed to providing inclusive and gender-affirming services to all youth. In 2025, 88% of our clients are people of color, including 49% Black, 26% Latinx, 6% multiracial, and 7% Asian. Our clients have an average age of 23, with nearly 20% being non-U.S. citizens and another 20% living in subsidized housing. Alarming, only 10% are employed full-time, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive support. These statistics highlight the significant barriers our youth face in achieving stability and self-sufficiency, emphasizing the critical role Youth Represent plays in empowering marginalized young people to overcome systemic challenges and build brighter futures.

Youth Represent: City Council Criminal Justice Programs Initiative Support

Youth Represent is seeking City Council funding, through the **Innovative Criminal Justice Programs Initiative, Court involved Youth Mental Health Initiative, Speaker Request Initiative** and the **Discharge Planning Initiative**. This funding will allow us to provide critical legal services and mental health services for youth. This year we have requested a total of \$450,000—which would allow us to disrupt cycles of legal system involvement and expand access to justice. We aim to strengthen and grow our network of clients, community members and partners, ensuring that low-income youth of color have access to high-quality, culturally competent legal services, youth development, and mental health services in neighborhoods with the highest needs level. We hope that you will renew and expand funding for Youth Represent and that you will do so in the context of a just budget—investing in the full range of services and supports that young people and families rely on.

We thank the Council for considering this testimony and for committing to bettering the futures of young people in New York City. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact Kate Rubin, Director of Policy, krubin@youthrepresent.org; (646) 759-8079.



STRONGER TOGETHER

March 19th, 2027

Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing – Committee on Children and Youth

Dear Chair Althea Stevens and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget. My name is Peter Rodriguez, and I am the Director of YouthBuild IGNITE. Rooted in East New York (NY Senate District 18), YouthBuild IGNITE is a Brooklyn-based alternative school and vocational training program that enables under employed, out-of-school youth, ages 17-24, to obtain their high school equivalency diplomas, develop tangible job skills, secure employment, and pursue higher education via college or vocational school. The program offers paid construction and health care training to students, providing them with valuable skills and certification from the National Center for Construction Education and Research (construction) and Prometric (healthcare), while helping to rehabilitate affordable housing in their community.

We are proud members of the NYC YouthBuild Collaborative and write to strongly support the continuation of YouthBuild funding and to urge the Council to:

Restoring funding for the NYC YouthBuild Initiative to \$2.1 million, the FY24 level, is critical to sustaining opportunities for justice-involved and underserved youth across the city. YouthBuild provides comprehensive education, workforce training, and leadership development, equipping participants with the skills and support needed to enter the construction trades, obtain Commercial Driver's Licenses, and build pathways to long-term employment. Reducing funding would undermine these proven programs, limiting access for the young people who rely on them to transform their futures and contribute positively to their communities. Maintaining full funding ensures that New York City continues to invest in equitable workforce development and the economic mobility of its youth.

At YouthBuild IGNITE our program focuses on comprehensive workforce development pathways, including construction training, building operations, and green jobs. We currently serve 55 young people annually from East New York and Brownsville, including youth from Council District(s) 18, 19, and 20.

Our participants face significant barriers, including housing instability, food insecurity, justice system involvement, and limited access to educational opportunities. Despite these challenges, our young people consistently demonstrate resilience and a strong commitment to building better futures.

Through YouthBuild IGNITE, participants receive a robust continuum of services designed to support both academic and career advancement. The program offers Pre-HSE and HSE preparation, OSHA 30-Hour Construction Authorization and 10-Hour Site Safety Training, NCCER Construction Certification, and Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) certification. Participants also benefit from paid job training, industry-recognized credentials, and comprehensive college and career placement assistance.

Over the past year, our program has:

- Supported 23 young people in earning their GED or advancing academically
- Helped participants earn 34 industry-recognized credentials
- Placed 27 graduates into employment, with wages ranging from \$18 to \$27.5 an hour

When our recent program graduate, Savannah Salikrim, originally joined the program in June 2025, she was anxious about getting her High School Equivalency (HSE) before the school year ended. With the clock ticking, she wasn't sure how she would manage. The thought of attending summer school, something she had little motivation for, felt overwhelming. But the program staff were there for her, encouraging her every step of the way. They helped her stay focused and reminded her how important it was to keep pushing forward.

Reluctantly, Savannah enrolled in summer school, and in the end, she was grateful she did. Not only did she complete the courses, but she also passed her GED exam on the first try—something she hadn't thought possible. Now, with her HSE in hand, the program is helping her enroll into its Certified Nursing Assistant training course, while also assisting her in exploring different colleges with nursing programs. Savannah is now excited about the future and grateful for the support that helped her overcome her initial doubts. "I really didn't want to give up my summer. Before joining the program, my friends and I had already made plans to go away. I'm thankful the staff were able to convince me to focus on my GED. Now instead of vacationing, I'm looking up colleges and I couldn't be happier."

Our model is intentionally hands-on and high-touch. We're not just offering classes—we're combining education, workforce training, leadership development, and real wraparound support. That level of investment is what it takes to re-engage young people who've been pushed out of or disconnected from traditional systems.

City Council funding is what makes this work possible. It allows us to provide stipends, deliver meaningful hands-on training, and ensure participants have consistent case management and support every step of the way.

Without restored funding, programs like ours will be forced to make tough calls—scaling back services or serving fewer young people. With it, we can continue to grow, reach more participants, and deepen the impact we know this model can have.

We respectfully urge the Council to restore NYC YouthBuild Initiative funding to \$2.1 million in the FY27 budget.

Thank you for your continued leadership and commitment to New York City's young people.

Sincerely
Peter Rodriguez, MPA
Director, YouthBuild IGNITE
Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation
276 Chestnut St, Brooklyn, NY 11208
peterr@cypresshills.org
(929) 459-2688

Adelo Ramirez

Email: info@adeloramirez.com

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] New York, NY 10016

www.adeloramirez.com

Implementing Daily Financial Literacy Through Math Instruction in NYC Middle & High Schools

Proposal for City Council, NYC Department of Education, and the Office of the Comptroller

I. Executive Summary

This proposal outlines a low-cost, high-impact strategy to embed daily financial literacy directly into existing middle and high school math instruction across New York City.

The initiative focuses on daily habit formation through a structured financial literacy workbook completed by teachers and students.

The long-term goal is to strengthen financial capability early, reduce long-term reliance on public assistance, and improve household stability while easing future fiscal pressure on the City.

The program requires no new class, no curriculum overhaul, and minimal daily instructional time.

II. Problem Statement

Financial instability and poverty are not solely income problems.

No salary—regardless of size—will ever be sufficient if spending behavior is not understood and controlled.

Poor financial habits compound across generations and are rarely addressed through formal education.

While public assistance programs are essential today, they create recurring fiscal pressure long term if root causes are not addressed early.

III. Why Math Class Is the Right Vehicle

Math is a required subject, ensuring universal reach across student populations.

Financial decision-making is inherently numerical and aligns naturally with math concepts already being taught.

Embedding financial literacy into math avoids the inefficiency of creating a standalone class and preserves instructional time.

The effectiveness of this approach comes from consistency, not duration.

IV. Implementation Model

Daily habit formation is a non-negotiable component of this program.

The workbook is designed for daily completion; weekly or occasional use undermines habit formation.

The workbook spans 60 weeks, each with seven daily entries, and is not calendar-bound.

Teachers complete the workbook using their own salaries; students complete it using their allowance or a parent or guardian income scenario.

This learn-by-doing approach removes abstraction and creates household-level engagement.

V. Time Requirements and Classroom Fit

Once learned, daily completion requires only 5–10 minutes per class.

This fits naturally within existing math periods, with the remainder of instructional time continuing as usual.

Creating a standalone class would leave unused instructional time and is therefore impractical.

No new curriculum, testing, or class structure is required.

VI. Teacher Onboarding and Support

Teacher onboarding consists of simple tool demonstrations, not professional development or certification.

Brief online or in-person demonstrations are sufficient for teachers to gain confidence.

Teachers typically become comfortable using the workbook within the first session.

The creator of the workbook is available to demonstrate effective use and support initial implementation.

VII. Stakeholder Benefits

Teachers benefit through increased personal financial awareness, reduced stress, and greater confidence teaching applied math.

Students develop daily financial awareness, discipline, and long-term decision-making skills.

Parents benefit indirectly through improved household conversations and financial transparency.

VIII. Measurement and Evaluation

Short-term evaluation over a conservative 3–6 month period will focus on teacher surveys capturing behavioral and instructional impact.

Student indicators include consistent daily tracking, improved needs-versus-wants decisions, and engagement.

Long-term outcomes include reduced reliance on emergency assistance and increased financial resilience as cohorts age.

This two-tier approach distinguishes early behavioral signals from long-term fiscal outcomes.

IX. Fiscal Relevance to New York City

This initiative represents a preventive investment rather than an expansion of assistance programs.

Improved financial capability reduces recurring public expenditures over time.

The goal is not to remove support, but to reduce the need for it through early intervention.

X. Cross-Agency Alignment

The Department of Education oversees classroom implementation and instructional alignment.

The Comptroller’s Office provides fiscal analysis and long-term sustainability insight.

City Council provides policy leadership and coordination.

The initiative is collaborative and non-political.

XI. NYC Leadership Opportunity

This initiative positions New York City as a national—and potentially global—leader in embedding practical financial literacy into core academic instruction.

The model is scalable and replicable for other cities and education systems.

XII. Conclusion

A simple daily tool can create lifelong habits.

By investing once in education, New York City can reduce long-term dependency, strengthen families, and improve fiscal sustainability.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Winette Saunders

Address: First Deputy Commissioner

I represent: Administration for Children's

Address: Services

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Stephanie Gendell

Address: Deputy Commissioner, External

I represent: Administration for Children's

Address: Services

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Margaret Pletnikoff

Address: Deputy Commissioner, Financial

I represent: Administration for Children's

Address: Services

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ina Mendez

Address: Deputy Commissioner, Family Permanency Services

I represent: _____

Address: Administration for Children's Services

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LUISA Linars

Address: Deputy Commissioner, Family Services Division

I represent: _____

Address: Administration for Children's Services

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nancy Ginsburg

Address: Deputy Commissioner, Division of Youth & Family Justice

I represent: _____

Address: Administration for Children's Services

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elizabeth Wolkowicz

Address: Deputy Commissioner, Child + Family

I represent: Well-Being

Address: Administration for Children's Services

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Melissa Hester

Address: Interim Commissioner

I represent: Administration for children's

Address: services

**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: MESSIAH RAMKISSOON

Address: _____

I represent: YOUTH JUSTICE NETWORK

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: CHANEL STAGGERS

Address: _____

I represent: ANTHOS HOME

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: SASHA KOUPITSOVA

Address: _____

I represent: ANTHOS HOME

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: HIZAM WAHIB

Address: _____

I represent: ARAB - AMERICAN

Address: FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kate Connolly

Address: _____

I represent: United Neighborhood Houses

Address: 45 Broadway

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

14

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Adelora Ramirez

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joe Titus

Address: [Redacted]

I represent: Alve class

Address: 239 Broadway, NY NY 10011

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Trenton Price

Address: _____

I represent: Salvadori

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

17

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Hazan WATHIB Arab American Family Support Center

Address: 150 COURT ST 3RD FL Brooklyn NY 11201

I represent: Arab American Family Support Center

Address: 150 COURT ST 3RD FL Brooklyn NY 11201

**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: Aaron Sanders

Address: 175 Delancey Street

I represent: Grand Street Settlement

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Eddie Vaughan

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: STEPHANIE SKAFF

Address: _____

I represent: PLAY-GROUND NYC

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: Jeannette Baanegra

Address: 2090 Honeywell Ave

I represent: Justice for Families - JMFAC

Address: 2090 Honeywell Ave

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: Gregory Brender

Address: _____

I represent: Day Care Council of New York

Address: _____

#7

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 3/16/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jasmine Reed-Corden

Address: _____

I represent: Figure Skating in Harlem

Address: _____

#6

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 3/16/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Isabella Perez

Address: _____

I represent: Armory College Prep

Address: _____

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

#5

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Leyana Ellison

Address: _____

I represent: Groundswell

Address: _____

#4

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kiyanna Braveboy

Address: _____

I represent: Lower Eastside Girls Club

Address: _____

#3

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Barneet Karr

Address: _____

I represent: Sadie Nash

Address: _____



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



#2

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Milena Benmergui

Address: _____

I represent: Figure Skating in Harlem

Address: _____

#1

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jonee Billy

Address: _____

I represent: Power Play NYC

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: Alex Griffith

Address: 17 Battery Pl 10004

I represent: exalt

Address: 17 Battery Pl 10004



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: DAPHNE HARRISON

Address: 2 Lafayette Street

I represent: DYCD

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. T2024-1358 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rebecca Cheahler

Address: 49 Thomas St.

I represent: Community Justice Unit of IAS

Address: 49 Thomas Street

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: [REDACTED] Sebastien Vante

Address: 2 Lafayette

I represent: Safe Horizon - Streetwork Project

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

34

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Amanda McCarthy

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn NY

I represent: CASES

Address: 151 Lawrence St. Brooklyn, 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: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Wendy Johnson

Address: 2 Calvert St

I represent: Dyeb Acco

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jahad Hay

Address: _____

I represent: Expand ED schools

Address: 218 W 40th St.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

Date: 3/16/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: YESSSENIA SERRA

Address: 104-19 Roosevelt Ave, Corona, NY 11368

I represent: MAKE THE ROAD NEW YORK

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: Kaveh Satchiyouy NYCC

Address: [REDACTED] 11193

I represent: @ NYCCAL

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: Teresa Baik

Address: [REDACTED] Bayside NY 11361

I represent: NYCAAL

Address: _____



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



**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

17 Ball
14 Ball

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ira Yanowitz

Address: _____ Brooklyn

I represent: NYCCAL

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: Sophia Shi

Address: _____ BAYSIDE 11361

I represent: NYCAAL

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: Gerald Kimbrough

Address: _____

I represent: Center for Justice Innovations

Address: 520 BAW

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: _____

Name: CAITLYN PASSARETTI (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: CITIZENS COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN OF NY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Galloway (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: Ali Fanny Center

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3-16-25

Name: Joshua Castillo (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 135 W 23rd Street New York, NY 10011

I represent: VISIONS

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

w/ panel

Appearance Card

[]

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

Date: 3/16/26

Name: Piyali Basak (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: NDS

I represent: neighborhood defender service

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: _____

Name: Trenton Price (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Salvadori Center

Address: 475 Riverside Dr, Suite 239, New York NY
10115

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

48

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

Date: 3/16/2026

Name: Samina Ganayeva (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 11 Park Place

I represent: The New York City Alliance Against

Address: Sexual Assault

**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: _____

Name: Gregory Ellis (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 11 Park Pl

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: _____

Name: Debra Sue Lorenzen (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 5+ Nicks Alliance 2 Kingsland Ave

I represent: _____ 11211

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/2026

Name: May DePiero (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 151 W 30th

I represent: Advocates for Children of NY

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

52

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

Date: 3/16/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: AASTHA MEXITA

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn NY 11217

I represent: Common Justice

Address: PO Box 25131 Brooklyn NY 11202

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 3/16/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mark Papish

Address: 25 Worth St

I represent: Center for Family Representation

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 3/16/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SUSAN GRAVES

Address: 48 Wadsworth Ave

I represent: NIMIC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lisbeth Delgado

Address: 43 wadsworth Ave

I represent: NMIC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Illiana Arand

Address: 48 wadsworth Ave

I represent: NMIC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sarah Cooperberg

Address: 45 wadsworth

I represent: NMIC

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/14/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joseph Manner

Address: 45 Wadsworth Ave

I represent: NMIC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michael A. Amann

Address: 45 Wadsworth Ave, NYC, NY 10033

I represent: NMIC (non-profit Manhattan Improvement Corporation)

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: NILA NATARAJAN

Address: 177 Livingston St, Brooklyn, NY 11201

I represent: Brooklyn Defender Services

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Forest Daley Perek Carter

Address: 1 Keray Gangadin

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Forest Daley Lakeray Gangadin

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 03/16/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: EMMA MCKHANN

Address: 25 Chapel St. Brooklyn NY 11201

I represent: GIRLS FOR GENDER EQUITY

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: Gerald Kimbrough

Address: _____

I represent: Center for justice Innovation SOS

Address: 850 Ave

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: Representative to the Council

Address: 44 Howard St

I represent: Community Justice Unit / LAS

Address: 44 Howard St

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

66

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Bonny White

Address: _____

I represent: The New York City Alliance

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: _____

Name: Keith Baumann (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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