

**Testimony of NYC Chief Equity Officer and Mayor's Office of Equity & Racial Justice  
Commissioner Afua Atta-Mensah  
Before the Committee on Civil and Human Rights  
Thursday, February 26, 2026 – 10:00 AM**

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Good morning, Chair Nurse, members of the Committees on Civil and Human Rights, distinguished members of the City Council, and the public. My name is Afua Atta-Mensah, and I serve as New York City's Chief Equity Officer and Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Equity & Racial Justice (MOERJ).

I am pleased to be joined today by Dabash Negash, Deputy Commissioner.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to speak before this committee today to properly introduce myself as I complete my third week in this role and provide insight and information about the work of the Office of Equity and Racial Justice.

Prior to serving in this role, I had the privilege of working with and on behalf of low-income New Yorkers as an attorney with the Legal Aid Society and other legal service providers. Thereafter I worked for Community Voices Heard leading its efforts to build the power of communities of color across New York before going on to serve as the Chief of Programs for Community Change, a national power building institution that provides campaign, advocacy, electoral and policy support to organizations across the country.

Most importantly, I am a New Yorker who deeply believes in the transformative power of individuals who come together for their communities, and I am committed to building a just and equitable New York City.

I think it is important to provide some background on the office of equity and racial justice, which was established as the City's centralized office that takes on an intersectional approach to advance equity across our city. Our mandate is rooted in a simple but powerful belief that every New Yorker deserves the opportunity to live, work, and thrive with dignity.

To realize that vision, MOERJ brings together several key initiatives and offices that work across government to tackle inequities experienced by communities in our city using various strategies from policy and research to advocacy and programs, including:

- the NYC Commission on Gender Equity, which works to ensure our city leads in the development and implementation of best practices in gender equitable policies and programs with a focus on economic mobility, health, and safety;
- the NYC Unity Project, which works to address inequities among LGBTQ\_ New Yorkers, particularly youth, people of color, and TGNCNB people;
- as well the NYC Young Men's Initiative and NYC Her Future, sibling offices focused on addressing inequities among young men of color and young women of color, respectively, in education, employment, health, and justice.

Our existence as an office is one that was guided by the will of the people of this city. New Yorkers overwhelmingly voted to embed racial equity and justice in our city's charter, which included:

- Documenting a vision and outlining a statement of values to guide how we carry out the work of government and serve the people;
- establishing the infrastructure to advance equity, including the creation of our office and the Commission on Racial Equity, as well as the development of the New York City's first citywide Racial Equity Plan; and
- ensuring we not only measure what it costs to meet basic needs, but to live with dignity in our city.

The previously mentioned foundational values in the preamble of the City Charter have served as the office's compass and urges all in government to:

- Justly value all talents and contributions
- Ensure the conditions for thriving for every person; and
- Embrace vigilance, remedy, and reconstruction.

As the office charged with implementing these mandates, our team has continued to translate our values into action and uplift these mandates with an eye towards transforming government.

As I shared, an important part of the office's work is developing and implementing New York City's first-ever Citywide Racial Equity Plan, including individual agency racial equity plans every two years and progress reports during off years.

According to our charter, the City's plan should include:

- Short and long-term goals
- Outcome measures
- Strategies to reduce racial disparities

The Commission on Racial Equity works to ensure community voice is integrated into the planning process, sharing community equity priorities and outcome indicators to inform the plan as it is crafted.

The MOERJ team designed a planning process aimed at moving government towards equity and justice together. This was not designed as a compliance exercise, but a unique opportunity for our city to work toward longer-term transformation. Over 40 agencies and 200+ staff were engaged in the process, and they were asked to review their priorities relative to the foundational values of the charter, assess disparity data and community equity priorities, and create short-, mid-term, and long-term goals and strategies that are responsive. The office supported agencies throughout the process of developing plans, leading full-day training workshops, developing planning tools to guide the process, providing continuous support throughout the process including dedicated office hours and 1:1 technical assistance.

As a living and active plan, we aim to continue working together with city agencies and all stakeholders to upend the ways in which structural racism impacts our city.

As the Mayor shared on his 15th day in office, our Administration is committed to releasing the City's first Preliminary Racial Equity Plan during his first 100 days in office. I, and the entire Mayor's Office of Equity & Racial Justice team, wholeheartedly share this commitment. We look forward to releasing the preliminary plan, finalizing it with the input of the public, as well as collaborating with our agency partners on implementation, the measuring of progress, and continuous improvements to eliminate racial disparities.

As a city leader three weeks into my role, I am learning a lot about this office and its current work. I also recognize this is a living plan and the first release is preliminary, so there will be more opportunity to make updates, including between the publication of the preliminary plan and the final plan, which consists of a period for community feedback.

Prior to embarking on the citywide racial equity planning process previously described, the office contemplated a framework to guide the city's first racial equity planning process and worked to:

- Understand and build on existing equity work across city government;
- Explore the approach, successes, and challenges of other localities advancing equity, including Philadelphia, Dallas, and Chicago; and
- Launch an advisory board to guide the implementation of the racial justice charter amendments, focusing on the citywide racial equity plan.
  - The board convened over a dozen members, including local nonprofit leaders, civil rights trailblazers, and former government leaders who understand municipal operations

With that guidance and support, the office was committed to building the strategic framework necessary to not only advance equity but support structural reform.

This required the office to ensure the framework addressed the core levers of government so the plan is transformative and sustainable. This meant centering things like service delivery, staffing, contracting, and budgeting from inception.

This required integrating these core levers into the process, and with regards to budgeting, working with agencies to consider if and how they allocate funds in their budget to remedy disinvestment and past harm as they contemplated how to approach their agency's plan and began to develop it. This can mean reallocating funds to meet the needs of historically marginalized communities, expanding services in key neighborhoods experiencing long-standing disparities, and more.

Given this is a living process and we will continue to refine and add to work, MOERJ has also continued to engage in equity in budgeting discussions over the last year, including discussions with academic institutions like the New School on the development and implementation of equity in budgeting tools as well as attending and participating in two events in 2025 co-hosted by the New School Institute on Race, Power, and Political Economy and the NYC Commission on Racial Equity.

As we continue moving this process forward, we are committed to collaborating with our budget colleagues to integrate racial equity into the budgeting process by:

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- Continuing to move city agencies to center equity in their own budget planning and decision-making, as new needs are just a fraction of the budget; and
- Working with our city's budget office to review agency requests with a lens that evaluates if and how proposals advance equity

Thank you for your commitment to creating a just and equitable city. We share that vision and we remain dedicated to building a future where all New York City residents can thrive. We welcome any questions you may have.



February 26, 2026

Testimony of Logan Clark, Assistant Director for Budget Review

On behalf of The New York City Independent Budget Office

Before the New York City Council Committee on Civil and Human Rights

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Good morning Chair Nurse, and esteemed members of Council,

I am Logan Clark, the Assistant Director of Budget Review at the New York City Independent Budget Office (IBO). IBO is a nonpartisan, independent government agency mandated by the New York City Charter. IBO's mission is to enhance public understanding of New York City's budget, public policy, and economy through independent analysis.

IBO thanks you for the invitation to testify today on this important topic: Budgeting for Equity. As the Illinois-based Civic Federation states: "A fundamental principle of equity-based budgeting is the use of data broken down by historically underrepresented economic and demographic characteristics to identify disparities and bias in tax systems and inform resource allocation. By collecting and analyzing data disaggregated by these factors, policymakers can pinpoint where inequities are most pronounced and direct funding to areas of greatest need."<sup>1</sup> IBO's data focus allows understanding of the opportunities and limitations to NYC's budget. IBO consistently focuses on issues of equity. Following this testimony is a list of IBO reports that address this dimension on a broad range of topics.

New York City's budget comprises several components: 1) the expense/operating budget; 2) the capital budget; and 3) the revenue budget. Questions of equity are different depending on which component is being considered. In the expense budget, IBO typically asks "Who could be, and who is actually being served by a program?" On the capital budget, the question becomes "Where and what and how is the City building?" Regarding the revenue budget, the questions are "Who is NYC collecting revenues from, and is this collection proportional? What revenues are not being collected, what is driving this?"

Let's address some of the central data challenges to tracking and measuring equity:

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- **Demographic Data:** While understanding policy design and outcomes on the basis of race, ethnicity, income, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability is central to equity, generally “administrative datasets” or systems of record typically do not track these factors.
- **Geographic Data:** New Yorkers should be able to rely on the City Charter Section 100G, which states “For each city agency that has local or borough service districts within community districts and boroughs, the Departmental Estimates and Executive Budget, where practicable shall contain a statement of proposed direct expenditures in each such service district for each requested unit of appropriation.” Yet the City’s existing report attempting to meet this requirement is extremely limited. The city’s budget publications include the [Geographic Report for the Expense Budget](#) a publication that only covers 14 agencies.” That subset of agencies comprises roughly \$10 billion in appropriations for fiscal year 2027, of which only \$1.8 billion is reported geographically. The Department of Education is a notable exclusion from this report, as are Human Resources Administration and Department of Homeless Services. This strains the Charter’s requirement that budget be reported geographically “where practicable” beyond credulity.
- **Budget Data and Budget Structures:** The lack of consistent detail in how budgets are categorized further adds to inability to understand equity. [IBO has testified to City Council and Charter Revision Commissions](#) that creating Units of Appropriation standards across agencies could greatly improve insight into New York City’s budget choices. The current structure of units of appropriation in many agencies does not conform to the original intent of the Charter to provide programmatic transparency within the budget.

Despite these challenges, assessing equity within the budget is not impossible. Far from it. IBO routinely uses geographic proxy data to rigorously evaluate City spending. Most often that involves the use of data from the United States Census. IBO appreciates Council’s leadership role in maintaining the quality of Census data collection and usage.

As the Council proceeds IBO suggests enhancing standards around units of appropriation and Charter Section 100G to encompass a broader scope within



the City budget. Thank you for the invitation to testify today, and we welcome the opportunity to continue this critical conversation with Council.

## Resources

- [DCP Capital Planning Map](#)
- Fair Share
  - [Office of the Comptroller 2023 Audit on “Fair Share” Policies](#)
  - [2015 DSNY Presentation on Siting Four Marine Transfer Stations](#)
- IBO Work Products:
  - [Personal Income Tax Tables \(Updated Jan 2026\)](#)
  - [Federal Changes Local Impact Series](#)
  - [Slow Buses \(Feb 2025\)](#)
  - [DEP Water Bills \(Oct 2024\)](#)
  - [Free Transit for Select Low-Income Riders \(Feb 2024\)](#)
  - [Stormwater Fees \(Nov 2023\)](#)
  - [Rezoning Investments and the CB11 Sanitation Garage papers \(both March 2024\)](#)
  - [Street Vendors \(revised April 2025\)](#)
  - [Legal Cannabis Market \(August 2023\)](#)
  - [Playground Expanded Hours \(January 2025\)](#)
  - [What it Takes to Thrive in New York City: How Many Public School Students' Neighborhood Incomes Meet the True Cost of Economic Security? \(June 2025\)](#)
  - [Improved Teacher Allocations Across School Districts but Disparities Continue: Fair Student Funding at Full Implementation \(June 2025\)](#)



To see more of IBO's work and to follow IBO on socials scan here:

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<sup>i</sup> [What is Equity-Based Budgeting? | Civic Federation](#)

<sup>ii</sup> The 14 agencies are: Mayoralty and the Police, Fire, Aging, Cultural Affairs, Youth and Community Development, Small Business Services, Housing Preservation and Development, Buildings, Health and Mental Hygiene, Environmental Protection, Sanitation, Transportation, Parks and Recreation Departments.





**JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS**

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**STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS TO  
THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS  
FEBRUARY 26, 2026**

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I want to thank Chair Nurse and the members of the Committee on Civil and Human Rights for holding this very important hearing.

*“We, the people of New York city, declare that our city is a multiracial democracy, and that our diversity is our strength.”*

So begins the preamble to New York City’s Charter, the document that declares our city’s fundamental values and governmental functions. In 2022, New Yorkers voted overwhelmingly to add this preamble to the Charter, which continues:

*“We strive to be a city where... equity and inclusiveness, community empowerment, accessibility, and opportunity for every New Yorker are the unwavering standards to which we are held accountable in all aspects of governance”.<sup>1</sup>*

On the same day in 2022, New York City voters codified the independent Commission on Racial Equity (CORE) and a “true cost of living” metric, which together aim to put the values articulated in the Charter preamble into practice. This tasked the Mayor with developing and releasing biannual Racial Equity Plans and true cost of living metric by mid-2024 and updating these plans every two years to align with the release of the preliminary City budget.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately the previous Mayor failed to live up to his Charter-mandated obligation and released neither. By now, we should have the original and updated versions of both the plans and metrics. Instead, CORE had to sue the previous administration over its illegal and immoral failure.<sup>3</sup>

Two independent organizations, the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies and the Urban Institute, took it upon themselves to create a “true cost of economic security” (or TCES) metric that reflects many aspects of the Charter-mandated measure. Following the TCES measure, the median New York City family with children would need to earn

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<sup>1</sup> [New York City Charter Preamble](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Charter § 1151-c, Charter § 3403-d](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Commission on Racial Equity sues the mayor: Independent agency files case due to delay in mandated plan’s release](#)



**JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS**

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\$165,300 per year to be economically secure. This is \$52,600 more than the median New York City family actually makes.

This already-enormous disparity is even worse for New Yorkers of color. Using the TCES metric, 43% of White New Yorkers are economically insecure but for Asian, Black and Latino New Yorkers that percentage stands at 63%, 68%, and 78% respectively. These disparities are geographic, too: 50% of New Yorkers in Manhattan versus 80% in the Bronx.<sup>4</sup> In the richest city in the richest country in the history of the world, it is a shame that anyone struggles to meet their basic needs and that after many decades of progress, New Yorkers of color face this burden so disproportionately.

It will take a whole-of-government approach to shrink racial and economic disparities, ensuring every New Yorker can comfortably access their basic needs. We often say that “budgets are moral documents. Releasing the Racial Equity Plans and true cost of living metric will be a next step towards the City budget reflecting the morals outlined in the City Charter.

I am encouraged by our new Mayor’s focus on affordability and my hope is that the administration will keep its promise to release the Racial Equity Plans within the first 100 days,<sup>5</sup> so that future City budgets can operationalize our commitment to ending racial inequities. I look forward to hearing testimony on this topic from the Commission on Racial Equity, from the Mayor’s Office of Equity & Racial Justice, and from members of the public.

Thank you.

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<sup>4</sup> [True Cost of Economic Security: Policy Implications for New York City](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Mayor Mamdani Appoints Afua Atta-Mensah as Chief Equity Officer and Commissioner of the Mayor’s Office of Equity & Racial Justice](#)



Testimony of FPWA

Presented to:

**New York City Council Committee on Civil and Human Rights**

**Chair Sandy Nurse**

**February 26, 2026**

Madeline Neighly

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We are grateful to the City Council Committee on Civil and Human Rights for holding this hearing and to Chair Sandy Nurse and members of the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of FPWA (Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies).

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FPWA is a leading anti-poverty, social policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening human services organizations and faith institutions and advancing economic security and justice for New Yorkers with low incomes. Since 1922, FPWA has driven groundbreaking policy reforms to better serve those in need. We work to dismantle the structural and systemic barriers that impede economic security and well-being, and we strengthen the capacity of human services agencies and faith organizations so New Yorkers with lower incomes can thrive and live with dignity.

In 2024, FPWA co-founded the National True Cost of Living Coalition. In partnership with Community Service Society of New York, FPWA commissioned the Urban Institute to develop a first-in-the-nation True Cost of Economic Security (TCES) measure, which provides a comprehensive view of households' costs and resources detailed at the county level.<sup>1</sup> This research revealed that across the nation, 52 percent of people—and 62 percent of New York residents<sup>2</sup>—are economically insecure, meaning they do not have the resources necessary to meet this comprehensive set of regular household costs, set aside savings both for future planning and for short-term emergencies, and manage debt. In certain areas and for certain demographic groups, that number is even higher. For instance, 72 percent of families with children in New York City—and an unconscionable 91 percent of single-parent households in New York City—fall below the TCES, with New Yorkers of color disproportionately experiencing economic insecurity.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, economic mobility has declined and wages have stagnated, leaving economic security out of reach for most New Yorkers.<sup>4,5</sup>

In light of pervasive economic insecurity, this Oversight hearing on Budgeting for Equity is both timely and critical. The Preliminary Budget paints a worrying picture for the future of equity in New York City. Seeking to address a \$5.4 billion revenue gap, the budget plan proposes inequitable tax hikes and savings initiatives for already underfunded services, all while 62 percent of New Yorkers do not have the resources needed to thrive in this city.

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<sup>1</sup> Acs, G., Dehry, I., Giannarelli, L., & Todd, M. (2024). *Measuring the True Cost of Economic Security: What does it take to thrive, not just survive, in the US today?* Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/Measuring-the-True-Cost-of-Economic-Security.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Martin, B., & Launius, J. (2025). *True Cost of Economic Insecurity: Policy implications for New York City*. FPWA. [https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/True-Cost-of-Economic-Security\\_Policy-Implications-for-New-York-City\\_9.29.25-1.pdf](https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/True-Cost-of-Economic-Security_Policy-Implications-for-New-York-City_9.29.25-1.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Martin, B., & Launius, J. (2025).

<sup>4</sup> Isaacs, J. B. (2016). *International comparisons of economic mobility*. The Brookings Institution. [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/02\\_economic\\_mobility\\_sawhill\\_ch3.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/02_economic_mobility_sawhill_ch3.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> DeSilver, D. (2018). *For most U.S. workers, real wages have barely budged in decades*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/08/07/for-most-us-workers-real-wages-have-barely-budged-for-decades/>

We share the Mayor's desire to avoid this budget path. The budget should not – and cannot – be balanced on the backs of low- and middle-income New Yorkers. FPWA's research shows that the City's budget gap is a symptom of a larger structural crisis, driven by years of inadequate investment in New Yorkers. Federal cuts, stagnate state contributions, and City taxes have disproportionately burdened low- and middle-income New Yorkers while failing to generate revenue that can keep pace with policy-induced economic insecurity.

Yet despite its role in driving the City's budget gap, the gap in individuals' and families' resources is not fully accounted for in a budget process oriented towards balancing the bottom line. At FPWA, we believe that this must change. To have a city where all New Yorkers not only survive but thrive, we must first see who struggles and why and have a measure that allows us to benchmark policymaking.

That is why we are asking the City to fulfil its obligation to annually calculate and report on the true cost of living for New Yorkers, and to use it to inform budgeting decisions.

A true cost of living measure, which considers not only the actual costs of living with dignity but also the resources individuals and families have to meet those needs, can help guide the City from a budget that struggles to alleviate poverty to one that ensures economic security for all.

### **New Yorkers' Support for a True Cost of Living Measure**

A majority of New Yorkers agree that a true cost of living measure should help guide budgetary decisions. In 2022, a charter revision mandating the City annually calculate and report on the true cost of living, and to use it to inform policy and programming decisions passed with 81 percent of the vote.<sup>6</sup>

This charter-mandated true cost of living measure arose out of the findings of the Racial Justice Commission. Formed in 2021 by the de Blasio administration, the Racial Justice Commission convened a citywide public engagement campaign inviting New Yorkers to share how systematic inequities affect their lives. As also attested in the groundswell around affordability during the mayoral race, many members of the public and representatives of community-based organizations expressed concern over the unaffordability of housing, transportation, food and other essential needs. Testimony shared during the hearings often centered around the failure of existing poverty metrics to guide policy making based on real affordability challenges.

Out of their research, the Commission found that poverty metrics were not only insufficient, but structurally flawed. The woefully inadequate Federal Poverty Line (FPL) – which currently sets the poverty line for a family of four at \$31,250<sup>7</sup> – is used to guide eligibility for a number of vital programs, from food and nutrition assistance, to health coverage, transportation assistance, cash and financial aid, childcare support, and certain housing supports. The FPL uses an outdated methodology that

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<sup>6</sup> Jones Austin, J. (2024, April 2). *NYC has to now measure the true cost of living [Opinion piece]*. FPWA. <https://www.fpwa.org/resource-center/in-the-news/nyc-has-to-now-measure-the-true-cost-of-living/>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. (2025). *2025 federal poverty guidelines [PDF]*. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/dd73d4f00d8a819d10b2fdb70d254f7b/detailed-guidelines-2025.pdf>

determines the poverty threshold for a family by multiplying the costs of a minimum food diet by three. This not only fails to take into account regional cost differences but does not reflect that health and housing now take up nearly half of family budgets, while food accounts for only 11.7 percent.<sup>8</sup>

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This failure of accounting leads to a vast underestimation of the number of New Yorkers who live in precarity and makes it difficult for the City to develop targeted, data-informed policies that increase economic security. By calling for this measure, New Yorkers were demanding a change in public policy and a reframing of economic thresholds, from one of poverty and deprivation to one that centers economic security for all.

To ensure an accurate and robust accounting of the costs, resources, and economic security needs of New Yorkers, the City worked with the same team that developed the national True Cost of Economic Security measure to develop New York City's true cost of living measure.

Yet while the City's Charter established the date of March 21, 2024, for the initial release of the City's true cost of living measure and accompanying report, the past mayoral administration failed to fulfill its obligation to New Yorkers. Nearly two years later, it is past time to release the City's true cost of living measure.

### **Why a TCL Measure is Needed, Drawing on Findings from TCES**

While the true cost of living measure and report remains unpublished by the City, we know that the measure will provide a useful tool for budget equity. Through FPWA's work with the Urban Institute on a national TCES measure, which compiles and analyzes county-level data, we already have New York City and borough-specific results, providing a much clearer and more detailed understanding of the state of economic security in our City.

The TCES methodology is an advancement beyond outdated poverty measures, creating a new threshold that takes into account the resources necessary to meet a comprehensive set of regular household costs, set aside savings both for future planning and for short-term emergencies, and manage debt.<sup>9</sup>

The results of the TCES data speak to the level of undercounted precarity in New York. Looking across all five boroughs, 62 percent of individuals and families, low- and middle-income, are economically

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<sup>8</sup> Martin, B., & Launius, J. (2025).

<sup>9</sup> Using the American Community Survey, the TCES offers a robust look at the costs families face today, measuring average costs for food, clothing, housing, health care, childcare, transportation, post-secondary education, debt service, and additional miscellaneous costs. In addition, the measure calculates the resources that individuals and families have to meet these costs, including labor earnings and self-employment income, some types of passive investment income, pensions and retirement income, government social insurance and public assistance programs like Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), as well as employer-provided healthcare contributions. Unique to this measure, the TCES includes a 10 percent savings threshold in the costs criteria that allows households to cover unexpected expenses and plan for the future. Acs, G., Dehry, I., Giannarelli, L., & Todd, M. (2024).

insecure, with the median New York City household with children facing annual costs of over \$165,000 but only having \$125,000 in resources.<sup>10</sup>

The number of New Yorkers living in economic insecurity varies drastically across our communities. For example, less than half of White New Yorkers (43 percent) are economically insecure, compared to 78 percent of Latino/a New Yorkers, 68 percent of Black New Yorkers, and 63 percent of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) New Yorkers. These racial discrepancies are also reflected in place-based disparities. In the predominately Latino/a Bronx, 78 percent of households are economically insecure, while 50 percent of households are economically insecure in Manhattan, the city's whitest and wealthiest borough.<sup>11</sup>

The widespread reality of economic insecurity falls hardest on families with children. Nearly 3 out of 4 families with children (72 percent) citywide fall below the TCES threshold. For single-parent households, the vast majority of which are headed by single mothers, the economic insecurity rate is an unconscionable 91 percent.<sup>12</sup>

The True Cost of Economic Security measure not only gives us statistics, it helps us to understand the drivers of disparate economic security, breaking down average costs unique to New York.

For individuals and families in New York City, the largest cost bucket is housing, followed by healthcare, childcare, and then food. This differs from the reality of the rest of the nation and underscores the importance of having measures that take into account the unique characteristics of New York City. For example, housing costs for the median family with children in New York are nearly twice the national average. For New York City families falling under the threshold of economic security, housing costs consume staggering 45 percent of their annual resources.<sup>13</sup>

Even more striking, the TCES data upends common misconceptions, revealing that the level of economic insecurity is driven not only by an affordability crisis but also a lack of resources. While the measure recognizes that New York City has higher costs than other cities, and that costs vary by borough, it is a difference in resources more than costs that drives economic insecurity.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, as our city grapples with affordability, insufficient wages are becoming more pervasive, rather than less. In New York City between 2019 and 2023, low- and medium-wage workers experienced

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<sup>10</sup> Martin, B., & Launius, J. (2025).

<sup>11</sup> Martin, B., & Launius, J. (2025).

<sup>12</sup> Martin, B., & Launius, J. (2025).

<sup>13</sup> Martin, B., & Launius, J. (2025).

<sup>14</sup> Acs, G., Dehry, I., Giannarelli, L., & Todd, M. (2024).

real wage loss of 2.8 percent and 2.4 percent respectively, while wage gains have been concentrated among the highest earners.<sup>15,16</sup>

On January 1, New York City's minimum wage rose to \$17 an hour. At \$17 an hour, a full-time worker paid for all 52 weeks of the year will earn \$35,360, well above the FPL but just under half of what the TCES measure tells us is required for a single person living in the City to reach economic security.

Without an appropriate measure, the struggles of New Yorkers are invisible to policymakers and cannot be adequately addressed by our budget process. In short, we cannot have budget equity if we do not have a full understanding of the economic situation of New Yorkers.

### **How a TCL Measure Could Guide Budget Equity**

In establishing a benchmark, the true cost of living measure provides an opportunity to reshape our budget priorities, ensuring they center economic security for New Yorkers and providing a pathway for policymaking. Similar to the national TCES, we are hopeful that the City's true cost of living measure will be a tool to guide equitable policymaking. By making visible the cost drivers of unaffordability, the resources available to New Yorkers, and where and among who economic precarity is concentrated, the measure can serve as a guidepost for where to target investments in shared economic opportunities.

Once we understand the variation and level of economic insecurity across New York City, it becomes clear that the City can no longer afford strategies that adjust around the edges. The scale of the resource gap is too large. New York City households with children that fall below TCES face an average resource gap of \$52,600. To ensure a city in which everyone thrives, we must fundamentally rethink the City's role in resourcing New Yorkers.

Guided by the true cost of living measure, we can budget to prioritize policies that increase access to resources and curb costs equitably. And the measure will allow policymakers to clearly see, and address, need.

Finally, a true cost of living measure which not only accounts for costs, but also resources, would reorient how the City thinks about revenue generation. The tax code is the City's largest fiscal tool, and it is through the tax code that resources are distributed. Despite this, the City's tax system currently contributes to an unequal and insufficient distribution of resources. Low- and middle-income communities, many of which are disproportionately comprised of Black and Brown New Yorkers, are subject to higher effective property tax rates and pay a notable portion of income and business taxes. At

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<sup>15</sup> Obaidy, M., Parrot, J., & Mehrotra, A. (2024). *Wage compression or wage divergence? Real wage growth comparison between New York City and the U.S., 2019–2023*. Center for New York City Affairs. <https://www.centernyc.org/s/Wages-report-oct9.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Obaidy, M. (2025). *While the top three percent of wage earners get richer, New York City's low-wage workers risk greater poverty*. Center for New York City Affairs. <https://www.centernyc.org/reports-briefs/while-the-top-three-percent-of-wage-earners-get-richer-new-york-citys-low-wage-workers-risk-greater-poverty>

the same, the growing wealth of a privileged few goes untaxed. This unequal system contributes to the budgetary challenge in which needs for public support is growing, while revenues are stagnating.

### **Conclusion**

In short, the true cost of living measure will give us the roadmap we need to budget for equity.

We know that budgeting for equity is not just a moral imperative, but an economic necessity. Without the resources to cover both typical household costs for housing, food, transportation, healthcare and childcare, and ensure savings for emergencies and the future, New Yorkers who can will leave the city. To ensure a thriving city for all New Yorkers we must prioritize budget and policy decisions that work to build economic security for all. In order to do so, we must have a full accounting of the needs, resources, and gaps in our communities.

Given the economic and moral imperative, we look forward to working with the Council and the Mayor's Office to utilize the City's true cost of living measure to ensure budget equity and a New York in which there is economic security for all.

February 26, 2026

## **The Legal Aid Society's Testimony Regarding the Importance of the New York City Commission on Human Rights and the Crisis in Staffing that is Harming New Yorkers**

**Submitted by Rebekah Cook-Mack**

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. I am a Staff Attorney in the Employment Law Unit of The Legal Aid Society.

The Mayor's preliminary budget proposal compounds, rather than addresses, the chronic underfunding the Commission has been subjected to since the pandemic. Funding the Commission at this anemic level and cutting their budget by almost 10% will not allow it to meet the needs of New Yorkers in this time of federal retrenchment. It will not be able to fully enforce the laws that have taken effect since the pandemic while simultaneously stepping up to fill federal shoes. To meet the needs of the most vulnerable New Yorkers today, we must invest in the Commission and ensure they can hire to fill the positions. We know that it is more essential now than ever. Funding the Commission at \$25 million in FY 27 and committing to right sizing its budget for coming years is an essential part of our City's response to the current federal administration. It is a necessary element to ensuring that New York City can hold the line and protect the rights of its most vulnerable residents – largely Black and Brown low-income New Yorkers. By protecting these New Yorkers in this moment, the Commission will act as a bulwark for all of us. Cutting the budget, as the mayor proposes, is a mistake.

**We call on the Mayor to reverse course and invest in the Commission so that it is funded at \$25 million in FY27. This is less than 0.02 percent of the City's \$127 billion dollar FY 27 preliminary budget – it is a rounding error.** Yet, these funds will ensure the Commission can rebuild so that it can meet the immediate needs of vulnerable New

**Justice in Every Borough.**

Yorkers in this unprecedented moment. Commissioner Clarke takes the reins at a time when the Commission is more important than ever. She cannot succeed if the City does not give her the resources necessary to do the job.

The New York City Human Rights Law (NYCHRL), administered by the Commission, prohibits discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. It protects against discriminatory lending practices, retaliation, discriminatory harassment, and bias-based profiling by law enforcement. It is one of the most comprehensive civil rights laws in the country and applies to a long list of protected classes beyond those recognized by the federal and New York State governments.<sup>1</sup> We commend City Council for its expansive view of civil and human rights, amending the NYCHRL over 40 times since 2013 to add additional protections for New Yorkers.<sup>2</sup> However, we must express our alarm at the chronic underfunding of the Commission, which prevents New Yorkers from receiving justice when faced with discrimination and is reflected in the Mayor's preliminary FY27 budget.

**The Legal Aid Society** is built on one simple but powerful belief: that no New Yorker should be denied the right to equal justice. We want to remain a beacon of hope for New Yorkers who feel neglected, regardless of who they are, where they come from, or how they identify. From our start nearly 150 years ago, our growth has mirrored that of the city we serve. Today, we are proud to be one of the largest and most influential social justice law firms in New York City and nationwide. Our staff deliver justice in every borough, working tirelessly to defend our clients and dismantle the hidden, systemic barriers that can prevent them from thriving. As passionate advocates for individuals and families, LAS is an indispensable component of the legal, social, and economic fabric of our city.

Last year, LAS provided direct holistic legal services to 475,000 individuals and their families through our Civil, Criminal, and Juvenile Rights Practices. Over 2 million New York City residents benefited from our direct representation, affirmative litigation,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nyc.gov/site/cchr/law/the-law.page>

<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.nyc.gov/site/cchr/law/amendments.page#:~:text=A%20Local%20Law%20to%20amend,%2C%20housing%2C%20and%20public%20accommodations>

legislative and policy advocacy. Our work across these Practices provides us with unique insights into the challenges facing marginalized communities in NYC and an unparalleled ability to effect change on a greater scale. Our Civil Practice works with low-income New Yorkers experiencing a broad range of civil legal issues that, without assistance, can escalate into situations with cascading effects that threaten their stability and keep families locked in cycles of poverty. Our specialized units cover the full spectrum of civil legal needs, including housing and homelessness; homeowner stabilization, family law and domestic violence; immigration; special education; health; community development; consumer issues; employment; government benefits and disability; taxes; and holistic services for vulnerable populations including the elderly, adults and children with disabilities, and people living with HIV/AIDS.

The Employment Law Unit represents low-wage workers in employment-related matters such as claims for violations of leave laws, unpaid wages, discrimination, trafficking, and unemployment insurance. Our clients are overwhelmingly people of color living paycheck to paycheck. The Unit conducts litigation, outreach, and advocacy designed to assist the most vulnerable workers in New York City, among them, low-wage workers who are sexually harassed; discriminated against based on race, national origin, immigration status, pregnancy, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identify, age, domestic violence, or criminal background; or denied reasonable accommodations needed due to pregnancy or disabilities.

The LGBTQ+ Unit of the Legal Aid Society seeks to address systemic issues impacting Legal Aid's LGBTQ+ clients through public education, advocacy, legislation, and impact litigation. It also provides trainings to Society staff on the New York State and New York City Human Rights Law's protections for LGBTQ+ people.

LAS provides legal and related services to individuals and families experiencing source of income discrimination. As part of this work, we provide legal assistance to low-income New Yorkers who are facing housing discrimination based on their source of income. This work entails advocacy and negotiation with brokers, owners, and landlords on behalf of clients and litigation of selected cases to end systemic practices that exclude voucher holders. In cases where landlords continue to discriminate based on source of income after being informed of their legal obligations to accept housing vouchers, LAS proceeds to litigate against the landlords to compel compliance.

Through this litigation, LAS seeks comprehensive remedies, including injunctive relief

requiring landlords to accept housing vouchers; policy changes to eliminate discriminatory screening and advertising practices; mandating fair housing trainings for ownership, management, and leasing staff; monitoring and reporting requirements to ensure ongoing compliance; compensatory damages for affected persons; and, where appropriate, civil penalties and attorneys' fees. Beyond individual cases, the work is designed to produce systemic change. By pursuing strategic enforcement actions, LAS aims to deter future discrimination, expand access to neighborhoods of opportunity for voucher holders, and reinforce the enforceability of source of income protections. CCHR should be a critical partner in this work, helping to identify patterns of noncompliance, conduct testing and investigations, support outreach and education to voucher holders and housing providers, and coordinate advocacy to strengthen programmatic enforcement efforts.

**We call on the Mayor to abandon the proposed budget cut and instead increase the FY26 budget for the Commission by \$10 million so that it is funded at \$25 million in FY27.** Investing in the Commission and funding them at \$25 million is a rounding error in the City's budget. This small amount of money - just 10% of the \$250 million **increase** the mayor proposes for the NYPD budget and under 4% in the proposed \$681 million dollar increase to the "miscellaneous" budget line - would have an oversized impact on the lives of New Yorkers if directed towards the Commission. Adequately funding the Commission - would allow it to meaningfully improve the lives of countless New Yorkers. It will enable the Commission to:

1. **Resolve Eligible Cases Through Early Intervention Within Two Weeks by Hiring and Supporting an Early Intervention Team.** This team should be at least 20 well-compensated and experienced advocates. With adequate funding this team could act within two weeks to secure apartments that were withdrawn once a landlord or broker discovered the applicant's rent was paid with government assistance or they had an old criminal record. They could keep people on the job or in their home by requiring reasonable accommodation.
2. **Appoint a Deputy Commissioner of Adjudications with appropriate staff in the Office of the Chair so that OATH Decisions Can Be Promptly and Timely Issued.** Under the prior administration, OATH decisions have languished for

months and years at CCHR awaiting a decision. During this delay no monetary or injunctive relief can issue.

- 3. Establish an Affirmative Litigation Team:** to ensure patterns identified by early intervention efforts, public reporting, and case investigations are pursued by CCHR.

The Mayor's preliminary budget catastrophically reduces the Commission's funding by almost 10% at a time when more is needed following years of disinvestment. In the absence of federal partners to protect the rights of the most vulnerable the Commission stands between undocumented workers and bad actors empowered by a federal government that is hostile to protecting their rights.

Without increased funding and the ability to hire without impediment, the Commission will continue to fail our city's residents. We call on our city to reinvest in the Commission so that it can occupy the field ceded by its federal counterparts. It is not yet too late for New York City to take decisive steps to protect vulnerable populations that have already been targeted by the federal administration. For Transgender, Gender Non-conforming, Nonbinary, and Intersex (TGNCNBI) and undocumented New Yorkers, federal partners are no longer viable avenues for protecting their rights. For these New Yorkers, the City Commission, which enforces a broad array of laws – more protective than state or federal counterparts – has become an indispensable partner. **The City should fund the Commission at a level commensurate with its heightened import.**

**This is a moment of urgency.** Without intervention, the situation will further deteriorate. Today's underfunded and understaffed Commission is not positioned to meet the needs of New Yorkers as federal partners retreat. It is not positioned to meet the needs of the undocumented or TGNCNBI New Yorkers who may reasonably fear the repercussions of filing complaints with a federal agency or in court. The Commission is failing New Yorkers and must be rescued.

We thank the Council for its consideration of this testimony. For more information or to address concerns, please feel free to contact me at [rcook-mack@legal-aid.org](mailto:rcook-mack@legal-aid.org) or (212) 298-5311.



Asian American Pacific Islanders for a Fair Budget

**New York City Council Fiscal Year 2027  
Preliminary Budget Hearings  
Committee on Civil and Human Rights  
February 26, 2026**

**The 18% and Growing Campaign:  
Fight For An Equitable Budget for AAPI New Yorkers**

I am Nikita Boyce and I am the Budget Policy Coordinator at CACF, the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families. Thank you to the Committee on Civil and Human Rights and City Council members for your time.

Since 1986, CACF is the nation's only pan-Asian children and families' advocacy organization that **leads the fight for transformative movements and policy, progressive systems change, and racial equity within government institutions to increasingly invest and equitably fund** community based organizations and city initiatives that directly impact and far reach the Asian American and Pacific Islander Diaspora, which include: East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, Southwest Asia, Central Asia, Pacific Island regions, and the Indo-Caribbean diaspora.

CACF leads the 18% and Growing Campaign, a critical and diverse city-wide campaign **uniting over 90 AAPI-led and serving organizations across New York City to fight for a fair and equitable budget that protects the needs of our most vulnerable community members**. We advocate as a collective in solidarity to hold New York City accountable in providing the necessary resources to serve and empower the diverse needs of all AAPI New Yorkers and other communities of color.

**The 18% and Growing Campaign is advocating for a more equitable budget for AAPI New Yorkers and that includes expanding the AAPI Community Support Initiative to \$7.5 million, the Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund to \$7.5 million, and the Access Health Initiative to \$4.5 million, among other key city-wide initiatives and investments.**



Asian American Pacific Islanders for a Fair Budget

**The AAPI Diaspora is the fastest growing ethnic diaspora in New York City, yet, it faces the highest rates of poverty, linguistic isolation, rising inequities, and widening gaps between social services.** We represent about 18% of the population of NYC after rapid growth over the last decade, but despite this growth, in the past few fiscal years, we have not seen many enhancements in critical city-wide initiatives though the needs on the ground have exponentially grown. AAPI organizations only receive a 6.25% share of discretionary funding (based on initial Schedule C data). As the needs of impacted communities become more diverse and require increased capacity, providers who are willing to do the work must have the resources needed to allow them to be able to best serve New Yorkers. That means AAPI-led and AAPI-serving organizations must be prioritized for funding opportunities.

AAPI Community Based Organizations provide trusted, culturally responsive, accessible resources and support services across the city. We employ thousands and serve hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. We not only deserve a more equitable fiscal investment because of the direct services provided, but because these services are provided in a manner that is culturally competent and linguistically accessible - far reaching our diverse communities when the widening gaps between social services and our most vulnerable are at its most apparent.

**Equity in budgeting is essential to receive the funding that our communities so desperately need in order to fill the gaps left by city government.** Currently, 1 in 5 AAPIs live in poverty. We want to build a community that provides culturally competent and linguistically accessible social services to the 78% of AAPIs who are foreign born. A community where the number of Anti-Asian Hate Crimes that are reported, underreported, and unreported decline drastically. A community that emphasizes safety as the presence of wellness in our society and empowers social safety nets and opportunities for communities of color to achieve their full potential in life.

**That's why CACF urges the New York City Council to uplift the collective priorities of the 18% and Growing Campaign which include expanding the funding provided to AAPI CBOs that provide culturally competent and linguistically accessible care to AAPI New Yorkers with expanding needs.** In order to take further steps in not envisioning, but truly creating a more inclusive, safe, healthy, and sustainable society for our diverse diaspora, we need an equitable budget that leads to a more value driven, culturally representative, and human centered New York City.

Thank you.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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I represent: Independent Budget Office

Address: 110 William St Floor 14

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Name: Roger L. Green

Address: [Redacted] Saint James Pl.

I represent: ~~NY~~ Coalition for a Democratic + Just N.Y.

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I represent: FPWA

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Eugene Pursoo

Address: [Redacted] Bklyn

I represent: CARIBBEAN Diaspora United, Inc

Address: 805 Pepperidge Rd. Westbury NY

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Name: Yvette Chen (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Fair Housing Justice Center

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Y. JENNINGS (PLEASE PRINT) URGENT

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

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