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TESTIMONY

BY

COMMISSIONER DYNISHAL GROSS

NYC DEPARTMENT OF SMALL BUSINESS SERVICES

BEFORE

THE COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

OF THE

NYC COUNCIL

FRIDAY, MARCH 21, 2025



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Introduction

Good morning, Chair Feliz, and good morning to the members of the New York City Council Committee on Small Business. My name is Dynishal Gross, and I have the privilege of serving as Commissioner of the New York City Department of Small Business Services (SBS). I am joined today by Executive Deputy Commissioner Michael Forte to discuss SBS's Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Preliminary Budget and how it supports SBS' mission of unlocking economic opportunity and creating economic security for all New Yorkers.

Our Resilient Local Economy

New York City is currently home to more than **183,000 small businesses**, the highest number ever recorded. **One in five small businesses** operating today opened during the Adams administration, and storefront vacancies have declined for five consecutive quarters. At the same time, we have experienced unprecedented job growth, not only recovering all **946,000 private-sector jobs** lost during the pandemic but also breaking the city's all-time jobs record ten times, with the number of jobs **exceeding 4.8 million**. These milestones were made possible through the administration's bold economic agenda, the strong partnership of the City Council, the tireless work of our sister agencies and of SBSers over the past three years to drive our recovery. Today, small businesses face other challenges, including an ever-changing regulatory landscape, shifting consumer behaviors, and economic pressures from trade tensions and other factors. Through our FY26 Preliminary Budget, SBS is well-positioned to continue delivering high-impact programs that help New York's small businesses adapt to changing conditions and advance New York City's economic momentum.



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Preliminary Budget Overview

SBS's FY26 Preliminary Budget stands at **\$182.1 million**. Approximately 40%, or **\$73.2 million**, represents pass-through funding for other city entities, including the NYC Economic Development Corporation at **\$38.7 million**, NYC Tourism + Conventions at **\$18.6 million**, and the Trust for Governors Island at **\$15.8 million**. As a conduit for these entities, SBS does not manage or spend any of these funds. The remaining **\$108.9M** includes SBS's core programming primarily delivered by our four programmatic divisions: the Division of Business Services (DBS), the Division of Economic and Financial Opportunity (DEFO), the Neighborhood Development Division (NDD), and the Division of Citywide Workforce Opportunity (CWO).

Division of Business Services

Our Division of Business Services helps small businesses open, operate, and grow through a range of programs and tools, including neighborhood-based Business Solution Centers, our SBS hotline (888-SBS-4NYC) and the MyCity business site. We provide financing assistance, legal support, business courses, mentorship, emergency preparedness, and more, ensuring that New Yorkers have the support they need at every stage of their business journeys. Addressing one of the biggest challenges for small businesses, SBS has helped entrepreneurs secure over **\$294 million** in financing in the current administration including the **\$85 million** NYC Small Business Opportunity Fund. Working alongside the NYC Economic Development Corporation, we also launched the first-ever Cannabis NYC Loan Fund last October to connect licensed cannabis entrepreneurs with the resources needed to turn their regulatory approvals into thriving businesses.



The story of Lifestyle 1104 Juice Bar exemplifies the impact of SBS business services. Lifestyle 1104 Juice Bar, in the Bronx, turned to SBS’s NYC Business Express Service Team (NYC BEST) as they worked to open their first location. Over the years, the owners have returned to SBS for assistance with permits, legal matters, and other compliance questions, relying on expertise from our pro-bono legal services and the NYC BEST team. Thanks to our support, Lifestyle 1104 Juice Bar successfully expanded and opened its second location near Penn Station this past January.

Similarly, when Jackson Heights entrepreneur Poonam Bhalla, owner of **Red Chilli**, called SBS’s hotline for help rescheduling an FDNY fire safety inspection, our team went beyond the original request to provide additional support. We walked her through key city regulations for food service establishments and worked with National Grid to ensure her utilities were turned on. As a result, Red Chilli officially opened for business on November 15, 2024. Every day, SBS works to help small businesses understand regulations and avoid unnecessary fines and fees. Last month, City Hall announced small business savings of **over \$50 million** through the dedicated work of the NYC Business Express Service Team and the City Council’s partnership in enacting more than 100 regulatory reforms stemming from the “Small Business Forward” initiative through Local Law 151 of 2023.

Division of Economic and Financial Opportunity

SBS’s Division of Economic and Financial Opportunity (DEFO) supports the growth of small businesses by providing certification support, technical assistance, legal services, and connections to city agencies for Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises, Local Business Enterprises and Emerging Business Enterprises. The impact of our programming is clear: in Fiscal Year 2024 alone, the city awarded **\$6.4 billion** in contracts to certified firms, and **nearly three-quarters** of these businesses had previously used SBS services to successfully navigate the procurement process. We continue working to



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open doors to growth through government contracting by hosting impactful events across the city. This past November, our 16th Annual Citywide Procurement Fair set a record with over **1,250 attendees** networking and learning about procurement opportunities.

One of those businesses is **Vivid Marketing Group**, a Southeast Queens-based company specializing in health and wellness education, training, and employee health screenings. Vivid has leveraged multiple rounds of one-on-one technical assistance and other SBS resources, which helped them secure three prime vendor contracts worth nearly **\$640,000** since January 2022. Another success story is **Dirty Gloves Drain Services**, founded by Nadine Clarke. Nadine won her first modest \$6,000 city contract in 2015 but knew she could do more. Over the past decade, she and her team have engaged with SBS's government contracting support, participating in our Selling to Government webinar series, FastTrack GrowthVenture training, and Bonding Services counseling. With SBS's support, Dirty Gloves has since secured eight prime contracts totaling over **\$3 million**. These success stories highlight the impact of our dedicated DEFO team, which expands access to city procurement and creates opportunities for businesses to scale and thrive.

Citywide Workforce Opportunity

New York City's greatest asset is its people, and at SBS, we power the backbone of the city's public workforce system, open to all adults looking for job and/or career support. Through our Division of Citywide Workforce Opportunity and our **18 Workforce1 Career Centers**, we connect job seekers with employment opportunities, career coaching, and no-cost training, while also helping local businesses with free hiring services. Since the start of the Adams administration, our network has placed over **71,000 New**



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Yorkers into jobs or workforce trainings, including more than **1,900 people with disabilities** and **3,200 veterans and military spouses**.

In Fiscal Year 2025, we further integrated the administration’s Jobs NYC initiative into our workforce services to deliver a seamless, whole-of-government approach in neighborhoods with high unemployment rates. The results of Jobs NYC speak for themselves: through more than **30 Jobs NYC hiring halls** across all five boroughs, we have facilitated nearly **3,400 on-site interviews**, leading to over **1,400 conditional job offers**. This preliminary budget continues investments in Jobs NYC, bringing resources, employers, and lifechanging job opportunities to New Yorkers across the five boroughs.

Beyond individual job placements, our occupational training serves as a critical bridge, equipping job seekers with the education and experience needed to secure employment in select industries. When launching new trainings, we study industry demand and seek employer partnerships to ensure program graduates have pathways to job opportunities. Our NCLEX-RN program for foreign-trained nurses, launched as part of Mayor Adams’ Blueprint for Economic Recovery, is designed to expand opportunities for New Yorkers entering the medical field. In New York City, registered nurses earn an average salary of more than **\$100,000 annually**, making this program both a powerful economic mobility tool and a response to an urgent need in healthcare employment, a local growth sector.

To showcase the impact of our work, I want to tell you the story of Maria, a primarily-Spanish-speaking New Yorker experiencing homelessness, who was referred to SBS by the Department of Homeless Services. Our Workforce1 Career Center staff provided Maria with resume assistance, interview preparation, and job placement support. Thanks to our team’s efforts, Maria secured a crew member



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position at Chipotle. My team is preparing for our next Jobs NYC Hiring Hall at the Staten Island YMCA's Gerard Carter Center on March 27, 2025. This event will connect even more New Yorkers to life-changing workforce opportunities that are available to residents any day through our Workforce1 career centers.

Neighborhood Development Division

SBS' Neighborhood Development Division (NDD) supports New York City's **76 Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)**, which collectively deliver more than **\$190 million** in services annually to over **24,000 storefronts** across nearly **300 miles** of commercial corridors in all five boroughs. I was proud to stand alongside Chair Feliz, Bronx Chamber of Commerce President Lisa Sorin, and leaders from the Fordham Road BID and several Bronx-based BIDs to celebrate the baselining of more than **\$5.3 million** for neighborhood development grants, bringing the administration's total investments to over **\$40 million**. These grants have funded innovative lighting projects, murals, and neighborhood wayfinding initiatives and other activities to support commercial corridors post-pandemic. They have also supported merchant organizing efforts, BID formation, and community events designed to boost business attraction and consumer spending through street fairs, restaurant weeks, and other cultural celebrations. In Councilmember Ung's district, the Downtown Flushing Transit Hub BID used its FY24 Small BID Grant to install security cameras, host self-defense classes for merchants, and enhance its social media presence.

Additionally, our grants support community-based non-profit organizations in producing Commercial District Needs Assessments (CDNAs), research projects that help community stakeholders assess economic activity, identify opportunities for growth, and determine areas for improvement. For



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example, In Councilmember Paladino’s district, the Queens Chamber of Commerce is leveraging a three-year Avenue NYC grant to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment in College Point, a project that builds on an SBS merchant organizing grant they received in FY24.

Under this administration, SBS has advanced the formation of three new Business Improvement Districts, including the Castle Hill BID in the Bronx, the West Village BID in Manhattan, and the Cypress Hills Fulton BID in Brooklyn. In addition, we have facilitated the expansion several existing BIDs. For example, through our BID formation grants, we supported Long Island City Partnership in more than doubling its catchment area from 73 blocks to 156 and increasing access to supplemental sanitation, district marketing, and business resources. This year, we also anticipate the formation of a new BID along East Harlem’s 125th Street business corridor, with an upcoming City Council Finance Committee hearing scheduled for March 26, 2025. I urge City Council members to support community members’ BID formation efforts, as BIDs strengthen local commercial corridors, establish sustainable funding for neighborhood enhancements, and create lasting economic opportunities for businesses and communities alike.



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Looking Forward

This May, we will celebrate the second annual NYC Small Business Month where our agency will collaborate with chambers of commerce to host small business events in all five boroughs, celebrate a citywide NYC BID Day uplifting the contributions of the city's 76 business improvements districts and end the month with the **2nd Annual NYC Small Business Month Expo**. This expo will bring together city, state, and federal resources under one roof to meet the needs of entrepreneurs across all stages, industries, and backgrounds. This year's event will take place in midtown Manhattan on **Thursday, May 29th**, at Center415 located at 415 Fifth Avenue. Last year, more than **3,000 New Yorkers** participated at the event with more than 150 types of services and over 40 city agencies. We'd be grateful for any help from your offices in promoting this event with constituents in the coming months.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and speak about this critical work, we're excited to continue delivering big for small businesses in FY26. We welcome any questions you may have for me or my team.



March 21, 2025

**Testimony Submitted by The Bronx Chamber of Commerce
NYC Small Business Services - Preliminary Oversight Hearing**

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Lisa Sorin, New Bronx Chamber of Commerce

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Gilbert Vega, TD Bank
Rob Walsh, Bronx Economic Development Corporation

Good afternoon, Chair Feliz and Members of the Committee on Small Businesses:

My name is Darry Saldana, Bronx Outreach Specialist Supervisor for the Small Business Resource Network. I am here on behalf of Lisa Sorin, President of the Bronx Chamber of Commerce.

The Bronx Chamber of Commerce is critical in helping local businesses in the Bronx grow, thrive, and remain competitive. The Chamber provides vital resources, advocacy, and services that are instrumental in addressing the challenges facing businesses in our borough. These services include, but are not limited to, business development programs, workforce training, public policy advocacy, access to capital, and economic development initiatives.

The Bronx is often overlooked and historically underfunded, yet it is home to a growing number of small businesses that serve as the backbone of the local economy and play a crucial role in the quality of life for residents. Despite their importance, these businesses face steep challenges—including high operational costs, complex regulatory requirements, and limited access to capital and technical assistance.

One of the most effective programs addressing these challenges is the Small Business Resource Network (SBRN). Unlike other initiatives, SBRN takes a proactive, high-touch approach, embedding Business Support Specialists directly in communities to provide in-person, tailored assistance. This model ensures that small business owners, many of whom are navigating bureaucracy for the first time, can access the resources they need quickly and efficiently.

City funding for SBRN is critical because it enables these specialists to provide ongoing, one-on-one support, rather than one-time assistance. Through this personalized case management model, SBRN helps businesses secure grants and loans, access legal counsel, navigate regulations, connect with business coaching, secure marketing and technology support, and tap into new sales opportunities.

The results speak for themselves: SBRN has already supported over 53,000 businesses across New York City, including 9,200 in the Bronx alone. Without continued funding, thousands of Bronx businesses would lose access to this vital, hands-on support, putting jobs, local investment, and economic growth at risk.

I urge the Council to restore the \$1.5 million for this vital program to ensure small businesses across the boroughs continue to thrive.

We thank you for your continued leadership and for considering this important request. We look forward to working together to secure a bright future for the Bronx. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.



03.21 - Bronx Chamber of Commerce Testimony – NYC Small Business Services - Preliminary Oversight Hearing

To Chair Feliz and Members of the Committee on Small Businesses:

My name is Lisa Sorin, and I am the President of the Bronx Chamber of Commerce. The Bronx Chamber of Commerce is critical in helping local businesses in the Bronx grow, thrive, and remain competitive. The Chamber provides vital resources, advocacy, and services that are instrumental in addressing the challenges facing businesses in our borough. These services include, but are not limited to, business development programs, workforce training, public policy advocacy, access to capital, and economic development initiatives.

The Bronx is often overlooked and historically underfunded, yet it is home to a growing number of small businesses that serve as the backbone of the local economy and play a crucial role in the quality of life for residents. Despite their importance, these businesses face steep challenges—including high operational costs, complex regulatory requirements, and limited access to capital and technical assistance.

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I urge the Council to restore the \$1.5 million for this vital program to ensure small businesses all across the boroughs continue to thrive.

We thank you for your continued leadership and for considering this important request. We look forward to working together to secure a bright future for the Bronx. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Fiscal 2026 Summary of NYC Council Citywide Funding Requests

Five Borough Chamber Alliance

\$2 million

The ***Five Borough Chamber Alliance***, launched in FY 2022, supports the NYC Small Business Resource Network (SBRN). The NYC SBRN is a comprehensive approach to small business resiliency that offers free, personalized guidance and support to help businesses grow and thrive. Originally launched as a pandemic recovery effort, the SBRN continues to support small businesses today via a collaborative partnership between the five borough Chambers of Commerce. Our unique service-delivery model places Business Support Specialists on the ground in neighborhoods across the city, helping businesses connect to free resources offered by both the public and private sectors, including financing, marketing, technology & e-commerce, legal, PPE, general business counseling. The SBRN and its team of Specialists have been an important outreach partner to NYC agencies and programs, including SBS, EM, DOT, and DCP, among others.

With a \$500,000 restoration and enhancement of \$1.5 million, the ***Five Borough Chamber Alliance*** will continue NYC SBRN services, maintaining our focus on MWBE businesses and underserved commercial corridors in each borough. SBRN will continue to help bridge the digital divide for small businesses, to connect them to essential free City services and programs and provide the deep support that the most vulnerable businesses require in order to participate in business support services.

Chamber on the Go

\$351,590

A restoration of ***\$350,000*** for the ***Chamber on the Go Initiative*** will allow the Chamber to continue to bring the Chamber's services directly to businesses across the borough. The goal of this outreach is to provide assistance to business owners who cannot leave their businesses, while simultaneously building a healthy and robust business environment throughout Brooklyn. A mobile van is deployed to various business districts, and with the guidance of individual City Council Members, we deliver an array of service including pro-bono legal assistance, financing, recruitment and training, marketing support, merchant and commercial corridor organizing, and other key support services. Our dedicated Chamber on the Go staff member provides outreach and mobile services throughout the borough with support from our membership department, business support division, economic development and our Business Solutions Center program in partnership with the NYC SBS.

Speaker's Initiative

\$400,000

The Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce respectfully requests **\$400,000** from the Council Speaker (and Brooklyn Delegation) for ***Expanding in your Neighborhood*** – direct services to reimagine commercial corridors, provide M/WBE certification and procurement assistance, and foster greater tourism. In addition, the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce is seeking to create a business growth and expansion program for independent makers and designers who are currently vendors of the Brooklyn Made Store, the Chamber's signature retail program. The Brooklyn Made Store, with two locations and an online / ecommerce component, currently supports over 160 small makers, 83% of whom are M/WBE. We plan on providing a six-workshop program to assist some of the smallest vendors in "scaling up," so they can continue to grow. Growth planning, financing access, digital marketing, inventory management, and many other key topics will be covered.

Contact:

Randy Peers, President & CEO – rpeers@brooklynchamber.com

Camille Hastick, VP External Affairs and Government Relations – chastick@brooklynchamber.com

Please note all funding requests are submitted under the Brooklyn Alliance, Inc. The Brooklyn Alliance is the not-for-profit (501c3) economic development arm of the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce.

Testimony of Linda Baran
President & CEO, Staten Island Chamber of Commerce
New York City Council Committee on Small Business
Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 21, 2025

Chair Feliz, members of the Committee on Small Business, and members of the New York City Council, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce (SICC). My name is Linda Baran, and I serve as the President and CEO of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce. Since 1895, the Chamber has been dedicated to supporting and advocating for Staten Island's business community. As the largest business organization in the borough, we serve approximately 700 businesses, representing nearly 20,000 employees, with 90% of our members operating businesses with ten or fewer employees.

Small businesses are the backbone of our borough's economy, and the Chamber is committed to providing them with the tools, resources, and advocacy they need to succeed. We achieve this through on-the-ground merchant assistance, economic development programs, and policy advocacy to ensure small businesses have a voice in City government. Today, I want to highlight several of our key initiatives that continue to make a meaningful impact on Staten Island's small business community and to emphasize the need for city funding to sustain and expand this work.

One of our flagship programs is the Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA), the only program of its kind in New York City. YEA is a transformative 16-week afterschool program that empowers high school students to become real entrepreneurs by developing business ideas, conducting market research, and pitching to investors. Since launching in 2013, 228 students have graduated from this program, equipping them with skills and experience that will benefit them throughout their careers. Investing in our future business leaders is an investment in our borough's long-term economic vitality.

Last year, the Chamber launched the Leading Ladies Collective (LLC), a first-of-its-kind program in Staten Island designed to support and empower female business owners. The inaugural cohort brought together 13 women-owned businesses for an eight-month program focused on financial literacy, legal support, marketing, networking, and MWBE certification. This initiative is a critical step toward strengthening women entrepreneurs in Staten Island, ensuring they have access to the resources and mentorship necessary for success.

The Chamber also plays a vital role in supporting commercial districts and merchant organizing. Through targeted place-based projects and services, we help form and revitalize merchant associations to strengthen our local business communities. With City Council support, our Chamber on the Go program provides direct, proactive assistance to small businesses, particularly in underserved areas. Staff conduct in-person and remote outreach to assess business needs and connect them with essential NYC Small Business Services (SBS) resources. In Fiscal Year 2024 alone, we reached 400 businesses and directly served 120. In the first half of Fiscal Year 2025, we have already reached 225 businesses and served 107, demonstrating the continued demand for this service. We are requesting a restoration of Chamber on the Go funding.

Our collaboration with the Five Borough Chamber Alliance through the Small Business Resource Network (SBRN) has been instrumental in providing tailored support to businesses across New York City. The SBRN connects small businesses to vital services, including financing, marketing, technology, legal assistance, and business strategy. To date, we have reached 5,434 Staten Island businesses, including 1,206 women- and minority-owned businesses. In Fiscal 2026, we respectfully request the Council's support for a \$2 million allocation to sustain and expand the Small Business Resource Network, through the Five Borough Chamber Alliance.

To support the development of new businesses and foster business growth, the Chamber plans to launch a new initiative to connect new immigrant and ethnic business communities to services. We have requested \$100,000 in Speaker funding to ensure that businesses receive the culturally competent guidance and resources they need to thrive.

The Staten Island Chamber of Commerce remains committed to fostering a strong and resilient small business community. We thank the Council for its continued support of small businesses and urge you to prioritize these investments in the upcoming budget. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and welcome any questions you may have.

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for FY26
Committee on Small Business, Council Member Oswald J. Feliz, Chair

Testimony of New York City Employment and Training Coalition (NYCETC)
Submitted by Gregory J Morris, CEO
March 21, 2025

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

Let's be candid: the Department of Small Business Services (SBS) plays a critical role in New York City's workforce system, but the City's investment in its services does not meet the scale of the need. According to our forthcoming report, "*Putting Our Dollars to Work: An Analysis of Public Funding for Workforce Development in New York City*," in FY2024, SBS received just \$57.5 million for workforce programming—less than 8% of the City's overall workforce budget—while funding for SBS has declined by 28.4% since 2009 in real dollars. This decline comes as New York City faces stubborn unemployment rates, especially for Black men (10.7%) and young adults (13.6%), and employers report labor shortages in key sectors.

Yes, SBS reports over 6,600 hires and promotions through Workforce1 Centers in the first four months of FY2025—but training enrollments are down year over year (from 2,523 to 1,837), and SBS continues to operate largely through and within the siloed, under-coordinated efforts of a New York City workforce ecosystem that is disconnected from broader economic development projects that could fuel neighborhood-based job growth and career mobility.

Beyond performance metrics, however, lies a more profound systemic failure: New York City's broken human services contracting system. Workforce providers—including those under contract with SBS—are owed hundreds of millions in overdue payments. These are not isolated glitches. They are structural failures that jeopardize service delivery, force providers into debt, and delay training and employment support for thousands of jobseekers.

To repair the system and unlock its full potential, we urge SBS and City leadership to adopt the strategic blueprint in the **NYCETC Workforce Development Agenda**. This agenda calls for a comprehensive, equity-centered overhaul of workforce delivery in New York City. Among its core proposals:

- The creation of a Workforce Navigator Corps, embedding trusted workforce professionals in communities to help jobseekers access services and align training with actual industry demand.
- Stronger partnerships with small and mid-sized businesses, especially those rooted in underserved neighborhoods, to ensure that local hiring is prioritized and supported.
- Major investments in human and social capital—including mentorship, digital literacy, and wraparound supports—to move New Yorkers into good jobs with family-sustaining wages.
- Modernized data infrastructure and accountability tools so we can track outcomes across the system and scale what works.
- Perhaps most urgently, the City should reform its contracting system to provide on-time, adequate, and flexible funding that allows nonprofit providers to function without financial risk.

This is about fixing inefficiencies and reimagining a workforce system that delivers economic mobility. When the system is fragmented and under-resourced, we cannot expect meaningful outcomes for workers or businesses. New York cannot build an inclusive economic recovery on a fractured system. It's time for bold investments, better alignment, and accountability. There is a pathway to doing more—and doing better—for our workers, our communities, and our future. Our City agencies, most especially, SBS, HRA, and DYCD, our City's workforce providers, our education and higher education systems, labor, and philanthropic partners must align behind a common agenda now to build a stronger, more equitable, and economically powerful and prosperous New York City.

I look forward to continued collaboration on these critical issues.



TESTIMONY BEFORE NYC COUNCIL – COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS
Preliminary Budget Hearing – SBS
March 21st 2025

Chair Feliz and Members of the New York City Council Committee on Small Business,

My name is Dirk McCall de Paloma and I am testifying today on behalf of the NYC BID Association. I am also the Executive Director of the Sunnyside Shines BID in Queens.

The NYC BID Association represents all of the city's 76 Business Improvement Districts which are as diverse as the city itself. We are proud to serve nearly 300 miles of commercial corridors including around 100,000 business and to invest more than a combined \$194M back into our communities.

We are very grateful for the partnership of Mayor Adams, SBS Commissioner Gross, and the City Council over the past year. As demand for BID services and the costs of providing those services continue to increase, support for BIDs is more important now than ever. We are therefore very heartened that the FY26 Prelim Budget included a baselining of funding for Small BID operational support, as well as the formation and expansion of BIDs. This funding stream has become critical for smaller BIDs, and this baselining will allow BIDs to do even bigger and better things over a longer time horizon with more strategic planning. There are still some major improvements needed to the contracting process for this funding that we look forward to working with SBS on. This includes late registration of contracts – we are in March and many contracts for FY25 still have not been registered. There are also concerns about the ability to subcontract and provide the most additional services possible to communities with these awards. We know that SBS is doing their best to move these contracts and hope that the agency will receive all the resources necessary to support small businesses and BIDs alike in FY26.

BIDs are seeing major headwinds on the horizon. We are deeply concerned about the looming containerization mandate from DSNY, which is a draconian rule forcing all BIDs to purchase and site containers, and to haul the public's trash. This is a major departure from current operations, and especially smaller BIDs may struggle to comply. While the goal of containerization is laudable, the worst case scenario here would be BIDs ceasing supplemental sanitation services altogether, which would lead to overflowing corner baskets. No one wants that.

Many BIDs are also struggling to address quality-of-life issues outside of their authority, including street homelessness and street vending. The primary goal of BIDs is to create welcoming and vibrant commercial corridors in which activated storefronts thrive. Without sufficient services to address street homelessness and enforcement of vending laws, it is extremely difficult for BIDs to deliver on these goals. We look forward to working together with SBS, the Council, and the administration to address these issues and more in the year ahead. Thank you very much.



Testimony Before the New York City Council Committee on Small Business Regarding Priorities for the New York City Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget

March 21, 2025

Thank you to Committee Chair Oswald Feliz and members of the Committee on Small Business for the opportunity to testify on the economic development-related proposals in the Mayor’s Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget. My name is Chris Walters and I am the Senior Land Use Policy Associate at the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD).

About the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD)

ANHD is one of the City’s lead policy, advocacy, technical assistance, and capacity-building organizations. We maintain a membership of 80+ neighborhood-based and city-wide nonprofit organizations that have affordable housing and/or equitable economic development as a central component of their mission. We are an essential citywide voice, bridging the power and impact of our member groups to build community power and ensure the right to affordable housing and thriving, equitable neighborhoods for all New Yorkers. We value justice, equity and opportunity, and we believe in the importance of movement building that centers marginalized communities in our work. We believe housing justice is economic justice is racial justice.

ANHD’s work directly supports the needs of our members who develop, manage, and organize to preserve affordable housing, and who fight to bring equity into low-wealth communities in New York City—especially communities of color. Our groups rely on us for technical assistance and capacity-building resources that allow them to maximize their resources, skills and impact. The support services, research, analysis, public education and coalition building we do helps to identify patterns of local neighborhood experiences and uplift citywide priorities and needs. Our work translates into the capacity to win new programs, policies and systems that ensure the creation and preservation of deeply and permanently affordable housing, and economic justice.

Support Commercial Tenants and Merchant Organizing Efforts

New York City’s small businesses are providers of culturally relevant goods and locally necessary services. Often, they are also commercial tenants facing rising rents and needing protection from harassment and predatory leasing practices. They are also members of merchant associations that come together around shared challenges and present a unified voice to decision makers. Lastly, small businesses are both users and stewards of our city’s public spaces in and around commercial corridors. In order to best support small businesses, the City must allocate resources that target needs in all of these areas.



ANHD's latest map of changes in storefront rents from 2019 to 2022 shows that storefront rents are returning to pre-pandemic levels in Manhattan and rising year over year in much of the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. Some Council Districts reported storefront rents increases of up to 33.3% over the three-year period. These storefront rent increases disproportionately affect communities of color in New York City. In the 24 districts where rents increased from 2019 to 2022, 67.8% of the population identified as people of color, compared to 47.5% in the seven districts where rents decreased during the same period.

Rising storefront rents indicate that small businesses are at risk of experiencing harassment and predatory leasing practices that aim to extract as much rent as possible from them and/or evict them in favor of higher-paying tenants. Although the commercial tenant anti-harassment law provides small businesses with some protection against predatory landlords, they rarely pursue legal action under this law due to the costs and fear of retaliation from their landlords. BIPOC and immigrant small business owners are most vulnerable to retaliation in the form of eviction, rent hikes, and further harassment and are least likely to be aware of city programs and legal tools due to language and digital barriers.

Despite the programs and resources that do exist, there currently are not enough resources to protect small businesses, especially those in communities of color. In order to protect these and all small businesses, we urge you to:

- **Expand the Commercial Lease Assistance Program:** ANHD emphasizes the importance of the CLA program, the only available resource for free legal assistance for small business owners and other commercial tenants. The CLA program has supported over 300 hundred businesses each year since 2022. Commercial tenants are vulnerable members of our community who intersect with residential tenants, immigrants and the working class, and should receive the same support. Our on-the-ground partners have observed that the need for legal support in leasing matters has only increased in the past several years since the pandemic. The CLA program must continue to be funded at a baseline minimum of \$5 million and be made a permanent SBS program.
- **Fund community-based organizations (CBOs) engaging in merchant organizing and outreach efforts:** We also recognize the importance of CBOs engaging in merchant organizing and outreach in helping small businesses access funding opportunities and contributing to thriving commercial corridors. These CBOs not only provide technical assistance and referrals to available resources, but also convene merchants associations and facilitate merchant unity and collaboration. Funding to these CBOs must continue and be expanded.
- **Increase funding to SBS's Neighborhood Development Division to support public realm work:** Lastly, we believe that the public realm is a part of the broader small business ecosystem and that thriving public spaces benefit hyperlocal economic development in New York City neighborhoods. Through our work with the Local Center in partnership with Urban Design Forum, we have seen CBOs create robust programming and design built infrastructure in public spaces in and around commercial corridors that have contributed to increased foot traffic and feelings of safety, and provided opportunities for merchant engagement and leadership.



City programs and resources are crucial to keeping our small businesses open and commercial corridors thriving. With adequate funding, legal service providers and CBOs engaging in both merchant organizing and public realm work can not only tackle individual small business challenges, but also begin to address the systemic issues that put small businesses at risk of closure and displacement in New York City.

Support NYC's Industrial Sector and Industrial Business Service Providers

The industrial sector plays a crucial role in creating a more equitable, thriving, and functioning New York City. Industrial jobs offer high wages, low barriers to entry, and opportunity pathways for a workforce that is 80% workers of color and over 50% foreign born. Preserving and growing these jobs lies at the heart of a true equitable economic development strategy.

- The industrial sector provides over 450,000 jobs in New York City, making up nearly 15% of our city's workforce, while contributing over \$1.7 billion annually in tax revenue.
- Industrial businesses are the second largest private sector employer in NYC, and pay an average wage of \$87,748 - significantly higher than retail and hospitality jobs
- 33% of all NYC jobs that pay over \$50,000 and do not require a college degree are industrial jobs.

In addition, the industrial sector is essential to the functioning of New York City's services and infrastructure and is critical to addressing our climate resiliency and climate adaptation needs now and into the future.

As a convener of the Industrial Jobs Coalition (IJC), a city-wide coalition of IBSPs, non-profit developers of industrial space, and industrial policy advocates, ANHD and our member organizations have long advocated for increased support for the industrial sector and IBSPs. IBSPs play a crucial role in supporting the industrial sector. Since the start of the Adams' administration alone, IBSPs have provided services to close to 2,000 businesses in Industrial Business Zones in all five boroughs. These services include increasing public safety, accessing incentive programs, accessing finance, leasing affordable industrial space, and providing public education, as well as serving as a connector between industrial businesses and City agencies, policies, and initiatives to help amplify and ensure their success. In addition, IBSPs are able to leverage other funding sources to amplify the impact of City funding and provide more impact for the taxpayer's dollars.

Yet City funding for IBSPs, managed by the Department of Small Business Services, has remained static for years and has not kept pace with inflation or the increasing responsibilities IBSPs have been asked to take on. In addition, IBSPs continually face long delays in receiving payment for their contracted work. This is true even as the support IBSPs provide remains more crucial than ever as they help industrial businesses navigate a difficult landscape that is often exacerbated by City policy, planning, and land use decisions that run counter to the preservation and growth of the industrial sector.



To ensure that industrial business can remain and thrive in NYC and that IBSPs can continue to play their vital role in serving them, we ask this Committee and City Council to help ensure that next year's City budget includes:

- In the general budget
 - **A 2% increase for all funds for all NYC industrial programs**
- Through the Department of Small Business Services budget
 - **A 50% increase in IBSP funding**
 - **Indexing the funding to inflation**
 - **Shifting the funding from a 1-year to a 3-year contract**
- Through the Speaker's discretionary funding
 - **A new \$650K program to build additional capacity for IBSP's by supporting projects such as research on industry and district trends, internal capacity building and other non IBSP program development**

With these increases, our members will have the resources they need to both service industrial businesses and recruit more of these businesses, which will benefit each and every New Yorker given the well-documented multiplier effect industry provides. Additionally, more resources for IBSPs will help the City achieve many of its equity and just transition goals – from the siting of green energy in our industrial zones, to providing assistance to the industrial sector to retrofit. A strong and vibrant industrial economy supports a strong and vibrant New York City.

We look forward to working in partnership with the Council to enact these changes. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please contact Chris Walters, Senior Land Use Policy Associate at ANHD at christopher.w@anhd.org for any questions or follow-up.



BROOKLYN LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION A ZOOM TESTIMONY FOR THE COMMITTEE
ON SMALL BUSINESS PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING

March 21, 2025

Good afternoon. My name is Alex Grzebyk and I am the Deputy Director of the Community & Economic Development Program at Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A, or “Brooklyn A.” We are the city contractor for the Department of Small Business Services’ Commercial Lease Assistance Program. As you may know, commercial tenants do not share the same legal protections as residential tenants in the City and having access to an attorney can be the difference between staying open and going under for many small businesses.

Through the CLA program we provide transactional legal services to small business owners across all five boroughs, offering things like negotiating new or renewal leases, terminations, or sublets; negotiating rent reductions and payment plans; and combating harassment or breach of contract. The services are for income-qualifying businesses and we do not serve chain franchises—our work aims to help vital pillars of New York City neighborhoods.

We are proud to have seen our case numbers increase for this program in the last year—we handled 1386 small business legal matters and reached a small business in all City Council districts but one. Our team provides consistent outreach resources through bi-monthly virtual legal clinics and regular webinars to ensure all NYC small business owners have access to our services and other useful resources.

Even with our continued success, we believe the program can grow. The CLA program does not allow us to litigate on behalf of our clients even though most small businesses cannot afford to pay for additional support for court appearances and litigation. Brooklyn A has seen repeatedly that if landlords are aware that attorneys cannot appear in court on behalf of small business clients, they are happy to evict longtime tenants to hike up rents.

We propose several options for a trial or pilot expansion of the CLA program:

building communities ensuring opportunity achieving justice.



- Allowing CLA counsel to appear in court to finalize and file agreements that have been negotiated out of court;
- Allowing CLA counsel additional permission to subcontract with legal service providers that can support small businesses in litigation;
- Or allowing CLA counsel to appear in court for a targeted class of small business clients, such as veterans, people affected by the carceral system, or business owners engaged in legal cannabis sales.

With more tools at our disposal, we can keep more small businesses open and serving their neighborhoods.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

building communities *ensuring opportunity* **achieving justice.**



WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL, SMALL BUSINESS
COMMITTEE, PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING BY BROOKLYN LEGAL SERVICES
CORPORATION A

March 21, 2025

Dear Chair Feliz and members of the Committee on Small Business,

My name is Jessica Rose and I am testifying on behalf of Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A ("Brooklyn A"). Brooklyn A is seeking funding for our Community and Economic Development program, which provides legal support for small businesses and nonprofits across the five boroughs and underscoring the importance of the Department of Small Business Services (SBS) Commercial Lease Assistance (CLA) Program. This year, we are applying for \$175,000 from the Neighborhood Development Grant Initiative (reference number 176975).

As the City's contractor under the SBS CLA Program, we represent small businesses across the city in commercial lease negotiations. As a result of other sources of state and city funding, including the Neighborhood Development Grant Initiative, we also represent small businesses and non-profits that need legal support for their startup, expansion and success; worker-owned cooperatives and solidarity economy projects building more equitable ways of working and living; and community activists fighting for equity for their communities and building grassroots power in movements for racial and economic justice. Our legal support gives our clients a greater chance of survival in an economic climate where many community-based non-profit organizations operate on shoestring budgets with few resources for legal support, and nearly 50% of new business establishments don't make it past five years.

For almost five decades, Brooklyn A had a robust service area of supporting non-profit clients, including small to midsize health centers, schools, and community development corporations. The focus of our Community and Economic Development program shifted to commercial lease assistance for small businesses over the last eight years as we

building communities ensuring opportunity achieving justice.

partnered with SBS to provide legal services through the CLA program. Small businesses are the fabric of the NYC economy, with an estimated 670,000 people working at microbusinesses (fewer than 20 employees) in the city. Today, both our small business work and our non-profit legal support are critical to protecting and preserving communities against displacement and gentrification.

Brooklyn A's commercial real estate services—including negotiating new or renewal leases, terminations, or sublets; enforcing the terms of a lease or other agreement with a landlord; negotiating rent reductions and payment plans when commercial tenants fall behind on rent payments; and combating harassment or breach of contract—help level the commercial lease playing field and prevent displacement due to ongoing gentrification as well as the consolidation of commercial space in the hands of fewer and larger national chains and corporations, ultimately improving a neighborhood's long-term economic outlook.

Last fiscal year, our small business program provided services on 1,386 small business matters—a slight increase from the previous year. We provided assistance to businesses in every council district in NYC in FY22 and all but one council district in FY23 and FY24. Each and every one of these neighborhood businesses plays its own crucial role as a part of their communities. Our small business project works closely with SBS and with a network of CBO partners to conduct outreach and intake citywide. We've partnered with these community organizations to host virtual and in-person events to connect us with prospective clients and receive referrals.

Brooklyn A also takes referrals from elected officials. We have an online referral portal for elected officials to refer constituents to our office directly into our legal database, improving efficiency of communication and information sharing. We have trained dozens of state and city officials' offices to use this portal.

Despite our successes with the CLA program, we have some ideas for how to improve the CLA program. Most notably, expanding the scope of legal services funded by the CLA program would enable us to grow our impact immeasurably. Many small businesses are struggling with landlord lawsuits that have come about because they fell behind in paying their rents—sometimes by just a few thousand dollars. The CLA program does not allow us to litigate on behalf of our clients even though most small businesses cannot afford to pay for additional support for court appearances and litigation. Brooklyn A has seen repeatedly that if landlords are aware that attorneys cannot appear in court on behalf of small business clients, they are happy to evict longtime tenants to hike up rents, even if it means keeping their storefronts vacant for months while they seek out tenants who might be able

to pay more. Several options would allow for an increase in small business support in a litigation capacity on a trial or pilot basis:

- Allowing CLA counsel to appear in court to finalize and file agreements that have been negotiated out of court;
- Allowing CLA counsel additional permission to subcontract with legal service providers that can support small businesses in litigation;
- Allowing CLA counsel to appear in court for a targeted class of small business clients, such as veterans, people affected by carceral system, or business owners engaged in legal cannabis sales.

I'd like to also say a few words about the other CED work done by Brooklyn A. We represent community-based nonprofit organizations, small businesses outside of the CLA program, worker cooperatives and other solidarity economy projects, and movement groups fighting for equity for their communities. In Fiscal Year 2024, we handled 88 of these cases, with additional cases referred to pro bono programs at large law firms. Some highlights of our work include:

1. We assisted a non-profit fund that distributes capital to support local cooperative, member-owned businesses with purchasing a three-story commercial property in Brooklyn. We reviewed and negotiated the purchase and sale agreement; provided guidance on organizational structuring, property tax implications, and title and survey issues; and assisted with tenant management and the negotiation of licensing agreements.
2. We assisted a worker coop that does food sourcing, packing and distribution with reviewing various loan documents aimed to support capacity building through the Black Farmer Fund, as well as providing advice regarding a lien on collateral and drafting a license agreement for a collaboration with a supermarket.
3. We also assisted a non-profit that did worker coop incubation and fiscal sponsorship with legal issues related to the organization's plans to fundraise for projects through certain collaborations with other non-profits, as well as providing general advice on 501(c)(3) compliance. This client was looking to create a revolving loan fund to cover startup costs for worker- and community-owned social enterprises that address major social problems such as bringing Internet access to low-income households to close the digital divide and incubating a driver-owned rideshare cooperative to upgrade job quality in the gig economy.

We have also been rebuilding our historic partnerships with larger community-based organizations, and we are very proud to do some of the legal work necessary to support the efforts of long-time community institutions like Cypress Hills LDC, Central Brooklyn Economic Development Corp, and Neighborhood Housing Services of Queens.

We hope you will take our suggestions on how to improve the CLA Program and support our work serving small businesses and nonprofits across the city in the coming year.

Thank you,

Jessica A. Rose, Esq.

Executive Director Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A

jrose@bka.org



Center for Family Life in Sunset Park

TESTIMONY

Preliminary Budget Hearing for Fiscal Year 2026:
“New York City’s Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative:
Worker Cooperatives to Fight Economic Inequality in NYC”

Presented to

New York City Council, Committee on Small Business
Hon. Oswald Feliz, Chair
Friday, March 21, 2025

Prepared By:

Juan Cuautle,
Program Director, Cooperative Development Program
Center for Family Life in Sunset Park

New York City’s Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative

Center for Family Life

443 39th St., Brooklyn, NY 11232
Phone: 718-633-4823

Good afternoon, Chair Oswald Feliz and distinguished members of the New York City Council Committee on Small Business.

My name is Juan Cuautle, Director of the Cooperative Development Program at the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park (CFL); a 47-year-old social service organization dedicated to providing vital resources to low-income families in Brooklyn, helping them to thrive and build sustainable futures.

I am here today to respectfully request that the New York City Council continue to support the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative (WCBDI) by allocating \$5.1 million for fiscal year 2026.

Since 2014, CFL has been a proud participant in WCBDI, an initiative funded by the Council that enables organizations like ours to incubate and nurture worker-owned businesses. Through this invaluable support, CFL has successfully incubated 27 cooperative businesses in the domestic work industry, empowering over 600 immigrant women with a transformative opportunity to take control of their economic and professional lives.

Each year, through our Cooperative Development Program, 420 participants benefit from training and information sessions on worker-owned cooperatives, business management, and community leadership. These sessions are designed to equip individuals with the skills and confidence needed to manage their own businesses. At CFL, we firmly believe that with the right resources, anyone—regardless of socio-economic status—can become a successful entrepreneur. The Council's support also allows us to provide 273 business management consulting services annually to operating cooperatives, ensuring their stability and growth. Importantly, all our services are offered in the languages spoken by our participants, breaking down language barriers and enhancing accessibility within immigrant communities.

Your continued support has enabled CFL to innovate and scale our initiatives, broadening the reach of the cooperative business model to other low-income communities across New York City. One of our proudest achievements is the creation of Up & Go, an online marketplace where clients can book and pay for residential and commercial cleaning services from worker-owned cooperatives. Since its launch in 2017, Up & Go has generated over \$3 million in sales, directly benefiting 100 families in our community. The average income for cooperative members through Up & Go is \$33 per hour—more than double the average wage of \$16 per hour for domestic workers outside the cooperative model. Additionally, Up & Go's cooperative infrastructure has completely eliminated wage theft, providing a safe and equitable work environment for all its members.

These accomplishments would not have been possible without the steadfast support of the New York City Council. Continued investment in worker-owned cooperative businesses through the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative is critical to combating economic inequality and fostering resilient communities throughout our city.

On behalf of the Center for Family Life, I thank you for your time, consideration, and unwavering commitment to economic equity. We look forward to your continued support in fiscal year 2026 and beyond.

Thank you.



Testimony from the Consortium for Worker Education (CWE)

Provided on March 21, 2025 to the Members of the Small Business Committee

To the Honorable Members of the City Council,

Good afternoon, Chair Feliz and esteemed members of the City Council. My name is Marco A. Carrión, and I represent the Consortium for Worker Education (CWE). For 40 years, CWE has been connecting New Yorkers to employment opportunities and educational resources, and I am here today to request your support for a vital funding initiative that will allow us to continue and expand this important work.

Who We Are

The Consortium for Worker Education (CWE) is committed to uplifting workers across New York City by providing education and workforce development programs. Our focus is on helping individuals gain access to meaningful employment opportunities and ensuring that they have the necessary support to succeed. We take a holistic approach, addressing critical areas of life such as housing, childcare, nutrition, legal support, and immigration services—all key factors that help workers overcome barriers to employment.

We operate through a large and diverse network of labor partners and community-based organizations. These partners provide the direct services that help individuals secure jobs, advance their careers, and achieve long-term economic stability. CWE plays a vital role supporting our partners through fiscal and administrative aid, ensuring that they have the resources needed to meet the needs of job seekers.

What We Do

At CWE, we believe that education is the key to empowering individuals. However, we understand that before someone can focus on securing a job, their basic needs must be met. Our model integrates workforce development with support for housing, childcare, legal aid, and more. This enables individuals to focus on gaining skills and seeking employment without being weighed down by other challenges.

We have built strong partnerships with labor unions and community-based organizations across the city, ensuring that our programs reflect the diverse needs of

New Yorkers. Through fiscal and administrative support, we ensure that these partners can deliver services to job seekers efficiently and effectively.

Why CWE Matters

CWE's funding is crucial because it allows us to leverage additional state funding for adult education. In this year's state budget, CWE was awarded \$13 million from the state legislature for adult education programs. However, to access this funding, we are required to secure matching funds from the City. Without these matching funds, we would be unable to draw down on the full state allocation.

This is where your support becomes vital. By providing the necessary matching funds, the City Council ensures that we can draw down 100% of our state funding, effectively doubling the resources available for adult education programs serving New York City residents. This means we can provide more services, more support, and greater opportunities for New Yorkers.

The City Council's funding allows us to maintain a strong, responsive network of partners who can serve job seekers without delays. It also ensures that our partners receive timely financial support, so they don't have to wait months to manage contracts with city agencies. This responsiveness is critical to the success of workforce development initiatives, and your support ensures that we can continue to meet the needs of New Yorkers in a fast-changing labor market.

Specifics of CWE's FY25 Funding Request

For this fiscal year, we are requesting a total of \$7.93 million to support four key programs:

1. **Jobs to Build On (JTBO)**, *Application#189666*
2. **Know Your Rights classes**, *Application #189832*
3. **Worker Service Centers (WSC)**, *Application #189772*
4. **Astoria Worker Project** (a new initiative housed under WSC), *Application #189934*

This request is part of the Speaker's Initiative funds, with the exception of the Astoria Worker Project, for which we are requesting \$100,000 in member items distributed across the Queens delegation and Council Members Caban, Krishnan, Moya, and Won.

Conclusion

The requested funds are essential to continue CWE's work, which directly benefits the New Yorkers we serve by helping them gain employment, access critical services, and

build better futures for themselves and their families. Your investment in CWE is an investment in the future of our workforce and the well-being of our city's residents.

We ask for your support in ensuring that we can continue our mission and expand our impact. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



TESTIMONY

Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget Hearing:

**“New York City’s Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative:
Worker Cooperative Businesses—Meeting the Moment, Lifting Up Immigrant Workers and
Entrepreneurs to Build a Stronger New York”**

Presented to

New York City Council, Committee on Small Business
Hon. Oswald Feliz, Chair
Friday, March 21, 2025

Prepared By:

Anh-Thu Nguyen
Director of Strategic Partnerships

New York City Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative

Democracy at Work Institute

254 36th Street Suite C-308

Brooklyn, NY 11232

Good afternoon, Chair Feliz and distinguished members of the New York City Council Committee on Small Business. It is an honor to address you all as I submit testimony in support of the hardworking worker-owners running cooperative small businesses in our communities. My name is Anh-Thu Nguyen and I am the Director of Strategic Partnerships at Democracy at Work Institute, a member of the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative (WCBDI).

Thanks to City Council's investment over the last ten fiscal cycles, WCBDI has provided significant benefit to aspiring business owners and cooperative small businesses under the administration of the NYC Department of Small Business Services. Our initiative creates and support resilient employment and business ownership opportunities unlike any other in New York. We provide critical support largely to low-wage and contingent workers, the majority of them foreign born and people of color--connecting them to business ownership opportunities, including when traditional routes to employment and business ownership are unavailable. Our work puts agency and assets in the hands of workers and their communities.

Some key achievements in the past few years have included:

- The successful launch of Afrilingual, an interpretation and translation cooperative that provides language support in over 10 African languages.
- The establishment of Radiate Consulting, a professional services consulting cooperative that builds capacity for immigrant services organizations and small businesses, led by professionals with deep experience in these spaces and who come from those communities themselves, which has doubled in size and reached profitability within two years of launch.
- The development of a rapid response cooperative business toolkit in English and Spanish for community based organizations to make small business entrepreneurship more accessible and inclusive to all communities.

Since its inception in Fiscal Year 2015, WCBDI has:

- Created more than 1000 jobs and pathways to business ownership.
- Created more than 200 new worker cooperative businesses that offer higher hourly wages, better working conditions and importantly, build wealth and equity for workers.
- And reached more than 10,000 entrepreneurs with education and technical assistance services.

Amidst ongoing economic volatility, low-income and immigrant New Yorkers are in need of support more than ever. We are familiar with navigating and thriving in times of crisis, as our small business support has helped scale and strengthen the cooperative ecosystem in NYC, being inclusive of all workers, especially immigrant workers. In COVID times, we expanded our services, grew our membership in alignment with increased demand, and moved more than \$20M in emergency funding to help small businesses thrive. Over the past year, our services have been in high-demand and especially impactful as a tool for providing access to small business ownership for the city's newer migrant community.

Worker cooperative businesses are unique in their ability to establish, grow, and retain community wealth, to make entrepreneurship accessible, and to create stable, dignified work. They are a haven for workers in low wage, high turnover, and often exploitative industries who have been traditionally marginalized and excluded from the broader economy. In NYC, the majority of worker-owners are immigrant women of color in industries like janitorial services, home health care, and child care. Through worker ownership, these individuals are bringing home living wages, building assets that contribute to financial stability, building worker power and leadership, and transforming industry standards for the better over time.

It is critical to continue the work that we are doing to improve worker protections, offer a means to build and root wealth in local communities, and sustain and grow the diversity of the small businesses in NYC for the next generation.

We urge City Council to continue investing in worker cooperatives in NYC, through enhancing WCBDI funding to \$5.09 million for FY26. This will provide for the start-up of 31 new worker cooperative small businesses and over 100 new jobs, as well as offer technical assistance and education reaching over 2000 existing, start-up, and aspiring cooperative entrepreneurs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.



EVERGREEN

Your North Brooklyn Business Exchange

Testimony of Evergreen to NYC Council Committee on Small Business March 21, 2025

Evergreen Inc.: Your North Brooklyn Business Exchange is a passionate champion for the industrial and manufacturing community. We advocate, guide, and serve. Our work anchors businesses so that employers, their workers, and the city can thrive. We are testifying today to make the following budget requests:

- A 2% increase for all funds for all NYC industrial programs in the general budget.
- A 50% increase in Industrial Business Solutions Providers (IBSP) funding in the Department of Small Business Services budget and indexing future funding to inflation
- Reinstitute 3-year IBSP contract term instead of 1 year extenders
- Fund a new \$650K program to build additional capacity for IBSP's by supporting projects such as research on industry and district trends, internal capacity building and other non IBSP program development through the Speaker's discretionary funding

Longtime Partnership with NYC

Since our organization's inception in 1982, Evergreen has partnered with the City of New York to serve the changing needs of North Brooklyn's industrial neighborhoods. Our earliest services focused on improving public safety in the industrial neighborhood. As the crime rate started to decrease, we became experts on the growing number of city and state incentive programs. We helped hundreds of growing businesses obtain tax benefits designed to defray the costs of expansion. When New York City created the Industrial Business Zone (IBZ) program in 2006 we were awarded contracts to provide technical assistance to businesses in the newly created Greenpoint-Williamsburg and North Brooklyn IBZs. As the 2008 recession hit, we obtained funding from NYC to purchase our first property at 108 Dobbin Street. With additional financial support from NYC we have been able to acquire 4 more properties—all of which we rent out at below market rates to small manufacturers. Our organization could not have served thousands of small businesses or developed five industrial buildings without our valuable partnership with the City of New York. This partnership and the keystone funding we get from the City is key to our success in the community.

NYC benefits from this partnership as well. We are able to leverage our other funding sources to augment our city funding streams to get a lot more business services bang for the taxpayer buck. Additionally, as a 40-plus year old community organization we have deep roots in the local business and residential community. We are seen as a trusted messenger and are able to reach constituents to introduce them to NYC programming that can meet their business growth needs more effectively than a government agency can. This is particularly helpful in times of disaster, such as the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy and the COVID-19 pandemic. We served hundreds of businesses during the pandemic, mostly by assisting them to apply for COVID relief funding such as PPP, EIDL or NYS and NYC disaster loans. Some of the businesses we served were ones that SBS assigned to our organization from 311 calls and other SBS channels that came in citywide, but many came from our own constituent base.



EVERGREEN

Your North Brooklyn Business Exchange

What We Do

Evergreen serves as the voice for businesses in industrial North Brooklyn. We represent their interests at public hearings and community meetings. We bring elected officials, like the membership of your City Council committees, to meet our businesses and their employees so you can really understand the impact of the policies you develop. We advocate with City, State and Federal officials to help them understand the impact of the Superfund process on the local economy, and we educate the local businesses about how the process might affect them. We continue to serve as the connection between the business and residential community for a variety of issues such as vehicle safety and truck routes. In addition to broad-based efforts, we work with individual businesses to navigate government agencies to resolve a variety of issues such as permits, tickets, graffiti removal, illegal dumping, utilities and signage. We are able to accomplish these outcomes for our local businesses as a result of our longstanding relationship within the local business community and with key agency staff.

In 2024 Evergreen staff served 178 individual businesses. One hundred thirteen firms received one-on-one assistance from Evergreen staff on over 187 issues. Business clients looked to Evergreen for a wide variety of services; the most frequently requested services were financial consultations and assistance navigating government. Evergreen was able to help 11 local firms apply for 23 different incentives. Sixty-one firms sent 78 attendees to our informational workshops and multi-week seminars. Workshop topics included BQE Visioning Sessions, Real Estate and Incentives, and First Aid for Feedback. Seminar topics were Human Resource Handbook, Establishing Financial Systems, Social Media on Your Own Terms and Company Culture.

The backbone of Evergreen's programming is our slate of educational offerings. This programming is two-prong, consisting of regular one-off, short-form technical assistance and networking workshops together with multi-session business development seminars. These seminars are designed to facilitate business growth with deeper dives into subject matter that will help decision makers in industrial businesses bolster their business acumen. In 2023, we continued to evolve our programming with the addition of significant one-on-one support to our longform seminars.

Why We Do It

Evergreen's programming meets the needs of North Brooklyn's underserved small industrial businesses, particularly manufacturers helmed by minorities and women. North Brooklyn is home to over 1200 industrial businesses with over 15,000 employees, representing approximately 14% of NYC's manufacturing base. Our community needs the good-quality, industrial jobs that these firms provide. About 15% of workers in North Brooklyn live locally, where the mean commute to work (34.5 minutes) is 8 minutes faster than workers borough-wide. The area's industrial businesses, which provide 22% of local jobs, pay 29% more on average than local retail establishments; or \$55,984 versus \$43,271 annually. Additionally, nearly 70% of industrial workers in the area have health insurance through their employer or a union, compared with 43.8% of accommodation and food service jobs. Borough-wide, only 51.5% of industrial workers have health insurance through their employer or a union, demonstrating this sector's unique strength in North Brooklyn. Also, these jobs frequently do not require English proficiency or advanced education. Twenty-eight percent of the local industrial workforce is foreign born and 31.4% is non-white. Considering 22.5% of our local residents have



EVERGREEN

Your North Brooklyn Business Exchange

limited English proficiency and 25.5% live below the poverty line, these jobs offer the best path to self sufficiency and economic security for our community residents.

How To Succeed

Appropriate levels of funding along with a multiyear contract for the IBSP program will ensure that we will be able to serve the many businesses that rely upon us for advice and support. Through the IBSP program, Evergreen is the portal for local industrial businesses to access city and state programs designed to help them. They rely on our expertise and relationships to help their firms grow in the community. We're their friend and confidant, and they feel good about us. As a 42-year old membership organization, Evergreen leverages the longstanding relationships it has with local businesses to promote and enroll firms in new public programs, ensuring their success. As an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Evergreen is able to augment city investment with donations from individuals and foundations, producing more bang for the buck. Additionally, IBZ funding for administrative overhead allows us to put other public and private funding investments straight into program delivery. Finally, Evergreen is an integral member of the community, and can serve as a liaison between local businesses, residents and city and state agencies when issues arise. We keep close tabs on the business community, and are able to quickly produce data for city staff as it is needed.

These services come at some cost. Our funding has been significantly reduced since the start of the Industrial Business Zone program and has remained static for the past decade. All the while the cost of providing these services (payroll, rent, insurance) continues to increase. Additionally, the original IBZ program allowed for a 3 year service contract. Generally there would be a lapse in payments as the new three year contract was registered, but reimbursements would be processed seamlessly for the majority of the three year term. Since 2019 we have gotten one year extender contracts that take nearly a year to process. This means that every year there is a 8 or 9 month gap between the start of our contract work and receiving payment for that work. For a small organization like mine it is absolute murder to manage cashflow and continue to make payroll and rent payments.

We deeply value our partnership with the NYC Department of Small Business Services. We know this program provides real value to our respective industrial communities. We ask that you consider increasing our contract funding to accommodate our organizations' increased cost of supplying business services, supporting IBSP capacity building with discretionary support and moving back to a 3 year contract system to establish some predictability and better manage cashflow.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss how we are able to nurture jobs in our community through the Industrial Business Service Provider program, and thank you again for your support.

Open Plans Testimony on 3/19/25 Committee on Small Business Budget Hearing

Open Plans writes today in regard to the Committee's budget hearing. We are an organization that fights for a more livable city, including more people-centered streets, efficient and equitable curb management, and well-managed public spaces. Our streets and public spaces are the lifeblood of our city, and funding and managing them properly is vital to the city's success. Below are our priorities for the FY 25-26 budget.

Public Space Management

In the last 20 years, the City has grown its involvement and role in creating and managing our public spaces. Important steps like the Public Space Equity Program and the creation of the Chief Public Realm Officer have shown that the City can and should be more involved in our public spaces. Well-managed public spaces stimulate our economy, create jobs (including low-barrier-to-entry stewardship jobs), help combat climate change, increase street and public space, and provide a host of additional benefits to our city. And communal uses of public space — like the 500 bike parking lockers, the implementation of which has been stalled and must be funded and built-out — yield results for all New Yorkers.

This is why, in addition to funding these organizations, the City must bolster its own ability to manage public spaces, and reorient the way it approaches management. In our report, *Framework for the Future*, we propose Public Space Teams — a group overseeing a Community District within the DOT's Office of Livable Streets consisting of:

- One Public Space Facilitator to oversee public space creation and planning in a District. Facilitators are a blend of existing DOT titles (Project Manager and Community Coordinator) totaling \$150,665 in fully loaded costs.
- One Public Space Coordinator, to assist in community outreach. Coordinators are the same position as a DOT Community Coordinator, totaling \$141,715 in fully loaded costs.
- A team of contracted Public Space Stewards to provide supplemental sanitation and street beautification services, similar to the Hort or ACE programs. Stewards represent a bulk of the spending, and their total cost is

dependent on the contract and number of Stewards required in each Community District.

We recommend five pilot Public Space Teams across the City, totaling an investment of \$25 million. These pilot Community Districts would be chosen intentionally with a focus on Priority Investment Areas as defined by the Streets Plan, in addition to existing public space, Business Improvement District coverage and size, and community input.

While we believe that investing in Public Space Teams would provide a management framework that works for all neighborhoods, our ultimate message to the Committee is: do not cut funding from the organizations already doing this vital work. We cannot afford to take steps backwards in the management of our public spaces.

Open Streets

In March, Open Streets operators called on the City to fully fund the Open Streets program by allocating \$48 million over the next three years to expand DOT and the City's capacity for supporting Open Streets and directly fund the organizations operating these programs. We support this important funding request.

The benefits of Open Streets have been routinely emphasized by City Hall. Mayor Adams said in 2022 that "Open Streets were an essential part of our city's economic recovery, and they will continue to be a core part of our city's future," DOT Commissioner Ydanis Rodriguez spoke similarly of the program in 2023: "The data is clear: When we give more space to people walking and biking, business thrives." The city directly reaps these economic benefits, enjoying higher tax revenue thanks to Open Streets.

While the Open Streets program is a sensational and innovative approach to transforming our streets, relying on provisional equipment and volunteer labor is not a sustainable arrangement. To ensure long-term stability for Open Streets sites, they need to be implemented with infrastructure, initially via "light-touch" streetscape changes — paint and planters — and ultimately via capital infrastructure work. Infrastructure investments reduce the amount of labor required to run the Open Streets, and thereby reduce operating costs.

Critically, these redesigns solidify street safety improvements gained by the Open Streets program. However, many of the promised street improvement projects and capital redesigns have been stalled, due to lack of staffing and resources at DOT, as well as interference by the Adams administration. It is key that the City provide DOT with the funding, resources, and staffing required to realize this work.

Furthermore, funding needs to go directly to the community partners operating the Open Streets and should be significantly increased. Volunteer community organizations have taken on the brunt of the work executing Open Streets programs — everything from planning, fundraising, daily operations, community programming, communication and outreach, and site management. The limited funding and decreases in funding that have occurred over the years jeopardize the continuity and future of the program — funding pressure is already leading to downsizing and the disappearance of Open Streets programs.

Similar initiatives in other cities around the world receive substantially more funding. For example, Montreal recently committed to extend their pedestrianized street program for another three years through 2028. This investment allocates \$12 million to pedestrianize streets, including up to \$700,000 that is directly available to each merchants association running one of these programs. This amount — more than 30 times the amount being provided to NYC Open Streets partners — aptly shows the value of these programs and the level of investment NYC should strive for.

A similar investment in Open Streets in NYC would likely produce incredible outcomes — substantial benefits for local businesses, reduced traffic injuries and improved air quality, reduced health care costs, and community programs and enrichment that have widespread socioeconomic benefits. Please directly fund community organizations that operate Open Streets.

In closing: we recognize that, in the light of the current situation at the federal-level, we face difficult times financially. We also stress that investments in our streets, our public spaces, and our transportation infrastructure pay back dividends in the short and long-term. We urge the Council to consider this fact in this budget cycle.

Respectfully,
Open Plans

Jackson Chabot



Director of Advocacy and Organizing
jacksonchabot@openplans.org



NYC City Council Committee on Small Business

March 21, 2025

Testimony of Mohamed Attia

Managing Director, Street Vendor Project at the Urban Justice Center

Good afternoon, Chair Feliz and committee members. My name is Mohamed Attia, I'm the Managing Director of the Street Vendor Project. Thanks for the opportunity to testify.

The Street Vendor Project is a membership-based organization with over 3,000 street vendor members. As the only organization in NYC dedicated to serving the street vendor population in the 5 boroughs, SVP is the centralized hub for street vendors to access resources and receive essential services as the smallest businesses in our city.

We respectfully request support from the City Council to expand our ***Community Outreach and Education Program*** & the ***Small Business Consultations Program*** for street vendors. The demand for street vendor education and services continues to grow.

It's important to highlight how resources are being allocated in our city, looking at the *Office of Street Vendor Enforcement*, housed under Sanitation Police, with an increasing budget that's ranging from \$3.7 million to 4.9 million dollars annually. That's not counting the NYPD, DOHMH, Parks and other agencies that enforce vending laws.

As was reported recently in [City Limits](#), the Office of Street Vendor Enforcement started with nearly 40 officers in 2023, now it's staffed by 87 Sanitation Police Officers, 24 lieutenants and 3 inspectors, almost tripling the number of officers started with (total 114)

In the meantime, no other City agency receives any dedicated funding to support street vendors with outreach, education or resources.

On the other hand, SVP receives around \$200 thousand dollars from Speaker's initiatives and individual councilmembers discretionary funding combined to provide the services that are desperately needed.

That's a scale of 25:1. for every dollar the city allocates for education and outreach, it spends 25 dollars on enforcement.

Our small but mighty team is well trained and equipped with the resources to conduct the outreach and education program and the small business consultations to vendors across the city. Our services are offered in 7 different languages; (Arabic, Bangla, English, French, Mandarin, Spanish and Wolof) same as our materials and resources we share with vendors.

We meet vendors where they're at, we meet them in the streets at their tables, carts and trucks, in the garages where they park and anywhere they can be found.

We hold monthly meetings and workshops where we educate the vendors on the vending laws, and support them with business compliance on various levels, such as the group workshops, individual consultations, helping them fill out the licenses and permits applications and support them as needed with the complex permitting process.

SVP fulfills a critical role since there's no city agency that meaningfully serves street vendors. SVP is eager to increase services to street vendors, but we need the City Council's support to increase our capacity to meet the demand of the community.

We hope that the City Council will consider our funding applications for the next fiscal year.

Thanks

Mohamed

TO: Oswald Feliz, Chair of Committee on Small Business, CM for the 15th District
CC: Elizabeth Yeampierre, Kat Trujillo
FROM: UPROSE
DATE: 3/20/2025

Hello Chairperson Feliz,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony for the Committee on Economic Development. My name is Osvaldo Garcia, and I am representing UPROSE, Brooklyn's oldest Latino organization. UPROSE is an intergenerational, multiracial, and matriarchal community organization working at the intersection of racial and climate justice. Our mission is to ensure a Just Transition to a sustainable and equitable future for frontline communities, particularly in Sunset Park, home to New York City's largest Significant Maritime Industrial Area (SMIA) and second-largest Industrial Business Zone (IBZ).

Since the 1990s, UPROSE has advocated for Sunset Park residents, fighting for access to green jobs, clean water and air, and expanded open spaces to combat climate change and environmental injustice. We have led multiple successful campaigns, most notably the development of the South Brooklyn Marine Terminal, New York State's first offshore wind (OSW) shipping hub, which will generate thousands of green jobs in the neighborhood. The development of SBMT is part of UPROSE's efforts to lead the Green Reindustrialization of Sunset Park which is New York City's largest Significant Maritime Industrial Area (SMIA) and its second-largest Industrial Business Zone (IBZ).

After a decade of community engagement, UPROSE developed the Grid 2.0, a vision created by Sunset Park residents to establish a regenerative economic strategy. While transition is inevitable, a Just Transition is not. Grid 2.0 outlines seven goals and thirty-one objectives for shifting from an extractive to a regenerative economy. Today, I highlight two key goals:

Goal 3: Support BIPOC and frontline organizations and institutions to create and attract new business activity in Climate and Clean Energy Manufacturing Services.

Goal 4: Create workforce pathways for immigrants and working-class people of color in Sunset Park, into just, living-wage employment in emerging Green and Clean Energy Industries.

Between 2002 and 2019, Sunset Park lost 49% of its manufacturing jobs, and the number of residents employed in manufacturing decreased by 62%. Additionally, 20% of households earn less than \$25,000, while 42% earn less than \$50,000, making economic stability increasingly out of reach. As the cost of living continues to rise, we must ensure that frontline environmental justice communities are not displaced.

To achieve these goals, the City Council must continue investing in workforce development programs and small business support, particularly at the hyperlocal level in Environmental Justice communities. Those most impacted by the climate crisis must directly benefit from family-sustaining green jobs that allow them to remain in their neighborhoods. These investments are critical to building generational wealth and preventing displacement through gentrification.

Furthermore, the City Council must prioritize funding for local small businesses—especially those most affected by COVID—to ensure they play a central role in redevelopment efforts. From HVAC system installations to window insulation projects, these businesses should be integral to the transition, rather than being sidelined in favor of external corporations. The City must not outsource economic opportunities at the expense of long-standing community businesses.

Lastly, we need to create better accountability measures for large corporate employers within the Clean Energy sector to ensure they continue to prioritize hiring locally, in particular from populations which have been systematically excluded and historically disadvantaged.

As federal funding continues to be paused for Offshore Wind and renewable energy, New York City must step up to ensure these green jobs come to fruition for the betterment of our most marginalized and vulnerable populations. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Oswaldo Garcia



Cristian Hidalgo's Testimony

New York City Council Committee on Small Business

Hearing on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026

March 21st, 2025

Good morning to all members of the Small Business Committee and those present.

My name is Cristian Hidalgo. I arrived in New York in April 2023, so I will soon complete two years living in this city. I am an active member of the Workers Justice Project. As a migrant, I have applied for asylum and already have my work permit. I am filing my taxes and contributing economically to this city.

My first work experience in New York was in the construction sector. The support from the Workers Justice Project was fundamental in this process, because I received Health and Safety training with OSHA and SST, which were very important. Later, I continued in the area of gardening, and more recently, I have dedicated myself to flower arrangement, participating in various training programs throughout this journey.

In Ecuador, my country of origin, I dedicated myself to artistic carpentry with recycled wood, creating ecological furniture, a labor that not only generates useful products but also contributes positively to the environment and to a sustainable economy. My business idea is to resume this activity here in New York, transforming discarded materials into functional and artistic objects. Additionally, I would like to conduct workshops and educate the community in the art of woodworking, signage, and large-scale pyrography, sharing knowledge that I have acquired over the years.

However, to implement these community ideas, I face several challenges, the main ones being the availability of adequate spaces and their high costs. It is necessary for the city to create favorable conditions to support initiatives like mine and for community organizations to be actively involved in the growth of small businesses like the one I aim to establish.

I ask you to consider:

1. Creating programs that facilitate access to spaces for immigrant entrepreneurs seeking to establish small businesses in their communities.



2. Strengthening support for community organizations like the Workers Justice Project, which not only advocate for our rights but also provide essential training for our labor integration.
3. Developing initiatives that recognize and promote businesses with positive environmental impact, such as my wood recycling project, which contribute to a more sustainable city.

Immigrants not only build this city with our hands, we also bring knowledge, skills, and visions that can enrich the economic and cultural fabric of New York. With adequate support, we can turn our dreams into realities that benefit the entire community.

Thank you for your attention.

Cristian Hidalgo, Member of the Workers Justice Project



TESTIMONY

Preliminary Budget Hearing:

“New York City’s Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative:
Worker Cooperatives- An Essential Model for Business Sustainability and Recovery”

Presented to

New York City Council hearing, Committee on Small Business
Hon. Oswald Feliz, Chair
Friday March 21, 2025

Prepared By:

Catherine Murcek, Worker-Owner
Samamkaya Yoga Back Care & Scoliosis Collective

Samamkaya Yoga Back Care & Scoliosis Collective
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Thank you Chair Feliz and Honorable Council Members of the Committee on Small Business for the opportunity to testify. My name is Catherine Murcek and I am a worker-owner at Samamkaya Yoga Back Care & Scoliosis Collective and an elected member of the Advocacy Council coordinated by the NYC Network of Worker Cooperatives (NYCNoWC), a partner organization of the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative (WCBDI). Our community of democratic worker-run businesses is predominantly led by women and people of color, representing communities across the five boroughs and a wide array of industries from cleaning to catering, manufacturing, media, childcare, and more. Thanks to the City Council's support over the last decade, we have the largest network of cooperatives in the U.S! I am testifying today to ask you to please **continue to support the great work of WCBDI** as a crucial component of a just recovery by **enhancing their funding to \$5,097,082**. As another part of those efforts I also urge you to **ramp up efforts to regulate commercial rents** as our small business community continues to struggle and face unreasonable rent hikes and closures due to non-forgiveness of pandemic back rent. These measures will help protect NYC's small business community by creating stability and resilience in our local economy.

My business, Samamkaya Yoga Back Care & Scoliosis Collective (www.samamkayabackcare.com), is a very special, small studio focusing on the therapeutic applications of yoga for people with a wide range of body types and ability levels, including those with Scoliosis, herniated discs, spinal fusion, and we even have an adaptive yoga class for people with more limiting disabilities like prosthetic limbs or physio-neurological disorders. In this way we work in support of disability justice by making yoga accessible to "every-body". Our business formed just over a decade ago when a group of instructors highly skilled in therapeutic yoga for back issues were feeling exploited and underappreciated at another studio and decided to start their own worker cooperative, which is, in other words, a business that is co-owned and democratically-run by its workers.

Because of the then newly-funded citywide initiative, WCBDI, the founding members were able to get legal support from NYCNoWC to form the business as an LLC cooperative with an Operating Agreement and a system for sharing profit based on the number of hours worked at the studio. One of the founders was fortunately able to provide a zero interest personal loan to the business to build out the small studio space in Chelsea to the very specific requirements of alignment-focused therapeutic yoga. In addition, through NYCNoWC's Principle 6 program the studio has over the years been able to have business cards printed for all faculty members by Radix Media cooperative. We have also been grateful to have attended a number of free workshops and business coaching sessions over the years from NYCNoWC, BOCnet, and CAMBA.

Joining Samamkaya as a worker-owner nine years ago has been a truly transformative experience for me. In an industry where most yoga instructors are accustomed to being treated as Independent contractors, to be able to have a vote in decisions about the business that will affect its members was really empowering. In addition, because cooperatives are built on certain principles including concern for community, one worker one vote, and training and education for its members, it has felt incredibly rewarding to be part of a values-driven business. Cooperatives

allow the freedom to get involved in different aspects of the business that one might not have thought of before; to learn and grow in new ways. For example, I joined my co-op's Finance Committee to learn and gain more comfortability with finances in general. Further, every member has incentive for the business to do well because every member is financially and energetically invested in the business and will do what it takes to see the business succeed.

This became even more clear for me at this time five years ago when so many non-essential businesses like mine were forced to close their doors in order to prevent further spread of COVID-19. All our members snapped into action as much as they were able, divvying up the tremendous labor of researching different platforms we might use to switch to online offerings and different grants that might be available to help keep us afloat. We completely revamped our schedule, pay, and fee structures in an equitable way that would help our studio survive but also for the teachers who were ineligible for unemployment; we worked together to find the best possible solution for both the business and its workers.

We were hopeful when SBS announced the Employee Retention Grant and Small Business Continuity Loan, but we were not eligible for the grant because we all work part-time and we really could not consider taking on more debt at this time since we still have a large debt from our start-up costs. Through the **Commercial Lease Assistance program (CLA)** we were able to access legal consultations with both TakeRoot Justice and Volunteers of Legal Services to advise us on our commercial lease and how we might approach negotiations with our landlord, which fortunately went well, and we hope you will continue to fund that program. Even though we were one of the fortunate few small businesses I know of to have been able to negotiate our rent, we did so on the condition that we renew our lease for another ten years, during which period our rent will gradually rise to "market rate". Unfortunately, this makes our future remain uncertain because our numbers have not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels and we have very limited opportunities for growth due to the small capacity of our space and the limits to what people will pay for yoga. A fair and just system of **commercial rent stabilization** would allow small businesses like mine to feel secure enough to plan for the future.

Even though we experienced significant losses in revenue during the pandemic, I know that we fared better than many other yoga studio and wellness businesses--of which so many have sadly closed for good--in a large part because of our democratic structure. Other traditionally-run studios I know of either reduced teachers' pay and number of classes, let go of teachers, or even closed their doors indefinitely. Because of the resiliency of the cooperative model, and because of the wonderful support offered by the WCBDI partner organizations and the cooperative ecosystem, I am more convinced than ever that cooperative businesses are a crucial component of a just economic recovery, for building a strong and resilient economy, and for building community wealth.

I urge the City council to continue **to support and build on the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative, enhancing its funding to \$5,097,082** so that all the incredible partner organizations involved can continue providing legal services, education, and technical assistance to our growing community of locally-driven community-focused businesses. The way

that the initiative partners coordinate and collaborate with each other is groundbreaking and shows a real commitment to economic democracy within development in addition to empowering small businesses through workplace democracy. They continued uninterrupted services throughout the pandemic and in many cases added services that were outside their original plans, like workshops to help worker owners respond to the crisis, information about available resources, and support for loan and grant applications. They also make sure that worker-owners have “a seat at the table” when making important decisions through the leadership skill building program of NYCNoWC’s Advocacy Council, which gives worker-owners the training and support they need to bring their voices to policy spaces. Furthermore, our network of WCBDI partners have and continue to serve as a much-needed support network for immigrant workers, providing **legal and technical support, know your rights trainings, and emergency support**, and they have ramped up those efforts under this current racist federal administration.

There is so much we are eager to explore with the City Council to help ensure that the workers in our small business communities aren't just surviving, but thriving. Most worker cooperatives in our community have not been able to **access affordable commercial spaces**, and we would deeply appreciate assistance with that. We have a goal of creating cooperative co-working hubs in every borough but for now, we lack the resources and capacity to make that a reality. Ideally these hubs would be developed using the **Community Land Trust** model in order to foster community control and economic democracy. Cooperatives are also eager to take on **procurement opportunities** with city agencies, but have had trouble accessing city contracts due to a variety of factors. In addition, **access to direct financing** has been a major barrier for many co-ops to access capital to start up their business or to help it grow. For now, the best option for most co-op startups is through the innovative model used by The Working World, a CDFI and a partner in the WCBDI which supports every one of its loan recipients with education and technical assistance to help them succeed, and only accepts repayment once the business is profitable, but their resources are limited and they need your support. Please refer to www.workercoop.nyc for more info about our municipal policy priorities.

Further, in coalition with and in support of other groups, I urge you to support long term community-driven efforts toward a just recovery by supporting the following. **1) Reintroduce** the former Intro 93 for **commercial rent stabilization, Draft a version A, and hold a hearing on it**. City council needs to take this very seriously in order to protect our broader small business community from future continued closures and displacement in the aftermath of the pandemic. Rents were already too high before the pandemic began, so we need long-term solutions to prevent further displacement of BIPOC- and immigrant-owned small businesses across the city. Landlords should not be allowed to quadruple a small business’s rent in order to get the highest bidder into a commercial space, but there is currently no law preventing that. A fair and just system of commercial rent stabilization would help to level the playing field, making much needed spaces more attainable for a more diverse array of small businesses, which are crucial for the cultural fabric of our great city. The idea that all commercial rents are lower or more manageable post-pandemic is completely inaccurate. **2) Preserve permanent funding** for the **Commercial Lease Assistance program** in the budget. **3) Please consider a new round of**

grant opportunities--as opposed to loans--with expanded eligibility and language access to allow for more types of small businesses to get back on their feet on the long road to economic recovery. **4) Fund community-based organizations engaged in merchant organizing and outreach** to give small businesses across the city the voice they deserve. **5) Finally, increase accessibility to SBS services for Limited English Proficiency immigrant small business owners** by expanding language capacity within the agency.

In conclusion, democratic workplaces in our most vulnerable communities help protect against wealth extraction by building up community wealth, the capacity for community control, and by protecting jobs and wages. My cooperative community members and I urge you to continue to support **WCBDI by enhancing their funding to \$5,097,082** and build on all efforts that prioritize equity—and protect NYC’s women, immigrants, and BIPOC small business workers from displacement—to ensure a just economic recovery. Thank you for your work and for reading my testimony.

Jacqueline Gilpin
Student at Teacher's College, Columbia University
03/11/2025

Subject: Expanding Green Cart Permits to Combat Food Insecurity in NYC

Dear New York City City Council,

I am writing to urge your support for the expansion of Green Cart permits in New York City, a crucial policy initiative that directly addresses food insecurity in underserved communities. As food deserts persist throughout the city, exacerbating health disparities and limiting access to fresh, nutritious food, expanding the Green Cart program is a pragmatic and cost-effective solution that aligns with public health and economic sustainability goals.

Food insecurity remains a pressing issue in NYC, disproportionately affecting low-income neighborhoods, where grocery stores offering fresh produce are scarce. According to the NYC Mayor's Office of Food Policy (2022), over 1.2 million residents, including 1 in 4 children, experience food insecurity. Green Carts, which provide affordable and accessible fruits and vegetables, provide a critical nutrition to individuals who might otherwise rely on nutrient-poor, processed foods. By expanding the number of permits available, the city can bridge gaps in food access while supporting local economic growth.

Data from the NYCDOHMH (2021) indicates that neighborhoods with Green Carts have seen a 9% increase in fruit and vegetable consumption compared to those without them. Expanding Green Cart permits will significantly benefit low-income residents, who will gain increased access to affordable, fresh produce, thus reducing their risk of diet-related illnesses such as obesity, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes (New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene [NYCDOHMH], 2021). The results of fewer diet-related diseases reduce healthcare costs that burden both the individual but the city at large. An increase in allowed permits also comes at a pertinent time, as many Green Carts are EBT eligible and can be a proactive response to reduction in SNAP benefits. This produce is typically more economically accessible to low-income families and may serve as the only feasible source of fruits and vegetables after these budget cuts. Additionally, street vendors, who are often immigrant entrepreneurs, will have greater economic opportunities, fostering local business growth and job creation while reducing instances of immigrant worker abuse. Therefore, increasing permits supports NYC's mission to improve public health, reduce diet-related medical costs, and foster local economic growth.

The NYC government has displayed a vested interest in supporting broader public health and economic resilience strategies through the OneNYC plan, which prioritizes sustainability, equity, and improved food access for all residents (NYC Mayor's Office, 2020) and efforts to increase SNAP benefits at farmer's markets. By increasing Green Cart permits, more people will have access to fresh fruits and vegetables in neighborhoods where produce is scarce, while also fostering community and equality among people of all different races, economic statuses, and lived experiences. Thus, not only will the city demonstrate its commitment to improving public health and economic growth, but its efforts to create accepting and diverse communities through the common goal of obtaining healthy foods.

Lastly, the positive outcomes of increasing Green Carts in NYC for health actually create a surplus of income for the government. By issuing more permits, the NYC council will receive more permit fees of \$75 annually, which can be used to support funding for other food access initiatives, such as improving school lunch (NYC Business, n.d.). Therefore, there are really no negative impacts in expanding the amount of allowed Green Carts, making this request a very easy amendment.

In all, expanding Green Cart permits is a strategic, high-impact policy move that will combat food insecurity, improve public health, foster economic prosperity, and increase diverse community building at little to no cost to the government. I urge you to prioritize this initiative and take meaningful action to ensure equitable food access for all New Yorkers.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your response and to seeing NYC actionably address food justice and sustainability.

Sincerely,
Jacqueline

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Council Member Oswald Feliz
250 Broadway, Suite 1759
New York, NY 10007

CC:

SBS - Commissioner Dynishal Gross, Executive Deputy Commissioner Michael Forte, Deputy Commissioner for the Neighborhood Development Division Calvin Brown
CM Feliz, CM Bottcher, CM Brooks-Powers, CM Krishnan, CM Paladino, CM Ung, CM Zhuang, CM Abreu, CM Cabán, CM Gutiérrez, CM Hanif, CM Hudson, CM Joseph, CM Louis, CM Restler, CM Salamanca
BP Gibson, BP Levine, BP Reynoso, BP Richards, Comptroller Lander

March 20th, 2025

Re: Small Business Budget Hearings and Financial Support for Open Streets Partners

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Chair Feliz,

The undersigned Open Streets organizers are asking the NYC Department of Small Business Services for financial support for our Open Streets on commercial corridors.

By transforming commercial corridors into pedestrian-friendly zones, the Open Streets program creates foot traffic, giving retailers and restaurateurs greater visibility and increasing customer engagement. For example, Open Streets correlate with “considerably lower [vacancies] than their surrounding neighborhoods as a whole” according to a [Department of City Planning report](#) released in 2024. Various other City-run studies over the past several years have shown similarly positive findings, including a [2022 report](#) on the Fifth Avenue Open Street that revealed the program generated an additional \$3 million in spending along that corridor and a 6% increase in spending on adjacent corridors. Another [DOT report from 2022](#) found Open Streets corresponded to a 10% increase in new business during the pandemic compared to a 20% contraction on non-Open Street corridors.

These are significant benefits for small businesses. However, ensuring the continued success of this program requires additional financial resources to support Open Streets operations, programming, and outreach. [Previously](#), federal pandemic stimulus money administered by SBS was available to Open Street partners operating on commercial corridors in the form of annual grants of \$50,000. Since this funding allocation has expired, the Open Streets program has grown smaller and less equitable. The number of [Open Streets listed](#) by the City has significantly decreased. There was a 40% decrease in listed Open Streets year over year from February of 2022 to February 2023. Additionally, those Open Streets that have remained have

grown more inequitable, becoming concentrated in Manhattan instead of the outer boroughs. In September 2021, 39% of Open Streets were in Manhattan, while in February 2023 59% were in Manhattan.

As we approach another spring, we urge you to consider making additional opportunities available for Open Streets partners operating on commercial corridors. The outcomes generated by successful Open Streets fall firmly within the mission of SBS to “[create] stronger businesses, and [build] thriving neighborhoods across the five boroughs.” Creating funding opportunities or programs for community-based Open Street partners around the city would ensure these community organizations maintain or increase the economic impacts of the Open Streets they run. SBS provides BIDs with financial support to this end, and accordingly Open Streets partners that serve the same function should receive funds in kind. Investing in Open Streets fosters an environment conducive to local commerce, tourism, and long-term economic growth. Your support would help local businesses and contribute to a more sustainable, accessible, and dynamic city.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We look forward to meeting to discuss this further.

Signed,

Loisaida Open Streets Community Coalition, Manhattan — City Council District 2

West 111th Street Block Association, Manhattan — City Council District 7

31st Ave Open Street Collective, Queens — City Council District 22

North Brooklyn Open Streets, Brooklyn — City Council District 33/34

Prospect Heights Neighborhood Development Council (Vanderbilt Avenue Open Street), Brooklyn — City Council District 35

5th Avenue Open Streets (Park Slope Open Streets), Brooklyn — City Council District 39

Newkirk Avenue Open Streets (Flatbush Development Corporation Open Streets), Brooklyn - City Council District 40/45

Open Plans

Transportation Alternatives

**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: 3/21/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DARRY SALDANA

Address: _____

I represent: The Bronx Chamber of Commerce

Address: 1700 Wakefield

**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: 3-21-25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mohamed Attia

Address: _____

I represent: Street Vendor Project

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: Chris Walters

Address: 50 Broad St.

I represent: ANHD

Address: _____

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**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: RANDY PIETS

Address: 253 36th St. Bklyn

I represent: Brooklyn Chamber of

Address: Commerce - C.A.M.C.

**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: Leah Archibald

Address: [Redacted] BK NY

I represent: Evergreen

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: YANKI TSPERINS

Address: _____

I represent: ACCOMPANY CAPITAL

Address: 343 14 St, Brooklyn NY 11215

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. N/A Res. No. N/A

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/21/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: COMMISSIONER DYNESHAL CARROSS

Address: 1 LIBERTY PLAZA, N.Y., N.Y.

I represent: NYC SMALL BUSINESS SERVICES

Address: 1 LIBERTY PLAZA, N.Y., N.Y.

**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: Cristian Hidalgo

Address: [REDACTED] NY, 11232

I represent: Workers Justices Project

Address: 365 Broadway, Brooklyn, NY, 11211

**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: 3-21-25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Linda Barron

Address: _____

I represent: Staten Island Chamber of Commerce

Address: 2555 Richmond Ave, Suite 240 S.F.M.Y.

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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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 in favor in opposition

Date: 3/21/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MICHAEL FORTE

Address: 1 LIBERTY PLAZA, N.Y., N.Y.

I represent: NYC SMALL BUSINESS SERVICES

Address: 1 LIBERTY PLAZA, N.Y., N.Y.

**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: DIRK McALL

Address: _____

I represent: NYC BID ASSOCIATION

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: 3/21/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sharon Brown

Address: _____

I represent: ROSE OF Sharon Enterprises

Address: 43 madison Street 3F

BLUEN NY 11238

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