

Dear Councilmembers:

I'm a gardener at a large East Village garden – in truth, really more like a small, volunteer-run public park. We, like many other gardens, have found ourselves unable to sign the 2019 Community Garden License Agreement between Parks and community gardens, and we have been frustrated by Parks/Green Thumb's apparent unwillingness to sit down with the gardens and our representatives collectively and find common ground. It's really hobbling our planning for the 2020 season and impacting our ability to maintain these great public spaces and serve our communities.

We have a few questions for Commissioner Silver:

- How can Parks and Green Thumb expect volunteer gardeners, many of us of modest means, to take on liability for any accidents that may occur in their gardens (per the Assumption of Risk clause in the license agreement)? How can gardeners be expected to purchase liability insurance for their events? Isn't this detrimental to the cause of encouraging volunteer-run public spaces that are open to the public and that host public events for the benefit of the community?
- These volunteer gardeners are largely working people, juggling family and work responsibilities in addition to their garden work. The license agreement and handbook as structured subjects them to onerous oversight over events and asks them to navigate a complex permitting process on their own dime. Why is Parks/Green Thumb making the task of hosting events and holding space for public assembly more burdensome for us gardeners?
- Don't provisions like those asking gardeners to waive their right to trial by jury and allowing Parks/Green Thumb to shutter gardens for any reason, without explanation, set us up for arbitrary enforcement and selective micromanaging of gardens, inviting petty bureaucrats to play favorites and punish those out of favor?

We're eager to get back to the work of growing food and flowers for our neighbors, creating green space for healing and reflection, helping to educate on and mitigate the damage of climate change, and hosting events that knit our communities together. We need Parks and Green Thumb to listen to us and help us find a solution to these questions that we can all live with. I thank you for your time and your advocacy on behalf of New York's precious green spaces.

Matthew Arnold

172 E 4th Street

New York, NY 10009



Testimony for the City Council Parks Committee Hearing To Direct Maintenance and Operations Funding to NYC Parks

March 13, 2020

Dear Chairperson and Council Members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation,

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on behalf of Gowanus Canal Conservancy (GCC). GCC is dedicated to facilitating the development of a resilient, vibrant, open space network centered on the Gowanus Canal through activating and empowering community stewardship of the Gowanus Watershed. Since 2006, we have served as the environmental steward for the neighborhood through leading grassroots volunteer projects; educating students on environmental issues; and working with agencies, elected officials, and the community to advocate for, build, and maintain innovative green infrastructure around the Gowanus Canal.

Through a proposed neighborhood rezoning and the Gowanus Canal Superfund clean-up, Gowanus will receive a new park, upwards of 800 new street trees, publicly-accessible open space along the canal, new public space managed by Parks on top of two sewage tanks, and remediation and renovations to Thomas Greene Park. These new green spaces are much needed in Gowanus, a topographical bowl—surrounded by Carroll Gardens, Cobble Hill, and Park Slope—and has a significantly lower tree canopy density than surrounding neighborhoods, which contributes to urban heat island risks and regular flooding.

With new park spaces and street trees to come online in the near future, it is important to consider the maintenance of the existing parks and green infrastructure currently managed by the Parks Department in Gowanus:

1. **St. Mary's Playground** – St. Mary's Playground is one of the few public open spaces currently in Gowanus serving the community on the west side of the mid-Canal area. The first phase of this play space was completed in April 2018 with new play equipment, benches, and pavements. A second phase including a skate park was recently completed. The hundreds that enjoy this new amenity deserve a commitment to maintenance and programming of their new playground.
2. **Ennis Playground** – Ennis Playground is newly renovated and sits between a scrap yard and sanitation depot in the heart of mixed-use Gowanus. The playground was reopened in July 2019 following extensive renovations including new play equipment, sidewalks, benches, picnic tables, water fountains, lighting, and basketball courts, in addition to a stormwater detention system to capture stormwater before it enters the combined sewer system and continues to contaminate the Gowanus Canal. These new hardscape and plantings need maintenance, so that the green and grey infrastructure performs to the best of its ability and serves the community into the

future. In addition, hypodermic needles have been found on multiple early mornings—parents bring their children and toddlers to the playground to find hypodermic needles hidden in the bushes and discarded near the slides. Ennis Playground deserves daily maintenance in the morning to safely dispose of sharps and in addition to regular maintenance focused on infrastructure and landscape.

3. **Thomas Greene Playground** – This park had once been considered as the site of a future sewage tank, but was saved thanks to strong community advocacy. The park currently floods during rainstorms so the basketball court is deemed unusable even after rain has passed. Thomas Green Park also sits on top of contaminated parcel of land, so a large portion of the park will be remediated in the future through the Gowanus Canal Superfund clean-up. As the only public greenspace and public pool near the north end of the Gowanus Canal we want to see a commitment to maintaining this park now and following remediation.

4. **Carroll and Bond Bioswale** – A Department of Transportation-owned site, managed by the Parks Department, the bioswale at the corner of Carroll and Bond Streets has seen maintenance both by GCC and the Parks Department. Recently, a change in staffing at Parks led to the native grasses and plantings to be clear-cut. We are working through a maintenance strategy now with the Parks Department for a clear division of maintenance between Parks and GCC to ensure that the bioswale is able to perform to its highest level, collect and manage stormwater flowing down Carroll Street, and contributes to the local ecosystem.

We applaud the increased funding for Parks Department maintenance and hope that the Parks Committee members advocate for even greater funding next fiscal year as the City continues to add green spaces to our city map, plant new street trees, and continue to combat climate change.

Gowanus Canal Conservancy fully supports the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation and its efforts to build, maintain, and improve parks across the City. It is important to the future of Gowanus and NYC that our parks maintenance is carefully considered.

Sincerely,

Jordan Heiden
Education & Communications Coordinator
Gowanus Canal Conservancy

**Testimony of Heather Lubov
Executive Director, City Parks Foundation
FY21 Preliminary Budget Hearing - March 13, 2020**

Good afternoon Chair Koo and members of the Parks Committee. I'm Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks Foundation, a non-profit organization that provides programs to encourage New Yorkers to use and care for their neighborhood parks and green spaces.

As you know, our city's parks are the most fundamentally democratic of public spaces, providing opportunities for recreation, enjoyment, and relaxation. Like everyone, we are closely following updates on COVID-19 and are taking precautions to protect our staff and participants. We want to thank the City Council and the Administration for their leadership during this challenging time.

We are honored to partner with and serve 310,000 New Yorkers of all ages every year through SummerStage, the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre and PuppetMobile, sports programs, environmental education programs, and Partnerships for Parks, our flagship community building program we manage jointly with NYC Parks. Everything we do is centered on our foundational belief that parks are important centers of community. Our staff and board remain deeply committed to resuming free programs in parks as soon as possible, knowing that those programs will be relied upon during difficult times.

Thanks to the Council's support, the Parks Equity Initiative has allowed us to expand our free arts, sports, and education programming as well as Partnerships for Parks. We have added sites for seniors fitness, new sports programs for kids, and new science-based environmental education programs. We have been able to present more prominent artists at SummerStage and have expanded Partnerships for Parks to support community volunteers through workshops, grants, visioning, mentorship, and Catalyst intensive outreach. We continue to see demand increase for volunteer projects across the city.

Last summer, thanks to capital funding from the Council, we opened our newly refurbished SummerStage at Rumsey Playfield in Central Park to great fanfare. We appreciate the city's continued partnership on this important program as we continue to improve our venue and provide diverse performing arts programs, free of charge.

Of course, everything we do at City Parks Foundation depends on the support of the Parks Department. We're a proud member of the Play Fair Coalition and ask the City to continue investing in our public parks and green spaces, which will be so important to New Yorkers in the coming months.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and thank you supporting City Parks Foundation.

**City Parks Foundation
Select Program Accomplishments**

Partnerships for Parks

Community Outreach	NYC FY19
Groups continuing engagement	473
New groups engaged	100
TOTAL groups engaged	573

Catalyst Outreach	NYC FY19
Meeting attendance	180
New partners engaged	146
New sites engaged	2
Total sites engaged	8

It's My Park Service Projects	CY 2019
Projects	1,279
Project hours	3,754
Attendance	26,519

Technical Assistance Support	NYC FY19
Public training workshops	29
Workshop attendees	515
Fellowship training graduates	40
Groups receiving community visioning support	16
Groups receiving coaching or short-term consulting	9
Group websites and publications produced	11
Groups receiving private grants	81

CityParks Shows

Program	CY 2019
SummerStage in Central Park	43 shows; 149,703 audiences
SummerStage in neighborhood parks	49 shows; 63,515 audiences
TOTAL SummerStage	92 shows; 213,218 audiences
Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre	373 shows; 30,638 audiences
PuppetMobile	107 shows; 24,050 audiences
TOTAL audiences served	267,906

CityParks Learn

Program	CY 2019
Learning Gardens	2,123 youth
Seeds to Trees	2,223 youth
Coastal Classroom	315 youth
Green Girls	414 youth
Community gardeners	41 adults
Community events	565 youth and adults
TOTAL served	5,681 youth and adults

CityParks Play

Program	CY 2019
Tennis	5,186
Golf	3,061
Track & Field	2,064
Soccer	455
Everyday Play (fitness 5 days/week)	163
Seniors Fitness	1,049
Family Adventure Races	278
TOTAL sports participants	12,093

City Council Parks Committee Budget Hearing 3/13/20

Good Morning:

Chairman Koo, Council Members, thank you for the opportunity to present our concerns and request for much needed funding for Athletic Field Maintenance.

I am Al Morales and I'm here today with Aurora Flores representing the United Athletic Association (UAA) a Not For Profit advocacy group representing some 16 Sports organizations throughout NYC. We're also members of the New Yorkers 4 Parks Play Fair Coalition and helped to get last year's increased budget for Parks.

We are back today asking for continued funding of parks and additional monies for a seriously needed **Field Maintenance Program**.

I'll hand it over to Ms. Flores now for our presentation.

Thank you.

40 sec.

Please roll the videos.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOKx7ppNZ-Q&feature=youtu.be>

We will present our concerns and offer some recommendations.

We've compiled some footage we'd like to play while we make our presentation that highlights damaged fields.

With no current maintenance program in place for natural surface grass and dirt fields compounded by the current lack of rules, regulations and guidelines, these fields will continue to become unsafe and unplayable shortly after their construction or reconstruction.

The damage begins right after a couple of rain falls on reconstructed natural surface grass and dirt fields where the drainage system is hampered by improper removal of the water puddles throughout the fields. They quickly become uneven and rapidly worsen with every rain fall. Without proper water removal, standing water can sit for days—even in sunny 70 plus degree weather, the fields remain unplayable.

We want to call your attention to this video of a recently renovated field.

For those of you that also play on AstroTurf fields shared with soccer, you may have noticed that goals are not secured when dragged into position for a soccer game on oval fields that are made for Baseball and Softball. We've videotaped the metal goalposts being dragged against the grain causing damage and tearing the turf apart at the seams.

This field was resurfaced with a new turf just six months ago and cost us the taxpayers, and the City, hundreds of thousands of dollars, and is already in need of repair.

One way to avoid and ensure further unnecessary damage done to fields is the allocation of permits. Parks should follow their own Rules, Regulations, and Guidelines and only permit the sports appropriate to a particular field.

If Parks current rules and regulations are properly followed and fields are properly assigned and maintained, reconstructed fields can and will exceed its life expectancy remaining safe and usable throughout.

Currently there are no dedicated maintenance workers responsible for athletic dirt and grass fields outside of Central Park. Having a dedicated trained field crew performing the simple task of properly removing the water in the morning hours and allowing the sun to dry them will save everyone lots of frustration, time, and money.

We support the tremendous investment this body and the City has and continues to make in our Parks and Athletic Fields. Proper Field Maintenance must be given the importance and priority it deserves if we are to preserve the investments currently being made to upgrade and renovate these fields. We need to do better. **We need a maintenance program for Athletic Fields.**

We have more documentation highlights of these issues that we can present to you at your convenience.

Thank you for your time.



"Teamwork makes the Dream Work.

ysaleagues.com

uaasports.org

New York Restoration Project

Testimony before New York City Council, Committee on Parks and Recreation, Public Budget Hearing
3/13/2020

Good Afternoon, and thank you to the Members of the Council for convening this hearing, and to Committee Chair Peter Koo for your leadership and support.

My name is Tara Gitter and I am here today on behalf of Lynn Kelly, Executive Director of New York Restoration Project (NYRP). New York Restoration Project is a non-profit organization dedicated to transforming open space in under-resourced communities to create a greener, more sustainable New York City. As the only natural land conservancy operating in all five boroughs, we strongly urge New York City to commit an additional \$200,000,000 to baseline funding for New York City Parks.

Since our founding, 25 years ago by Bette Midler, NYRP has planted trees, renovated gardens, restored parks, and transformed open space for communities throughout New York City's five boroughs. We fortify the City's aging infrastructure and create a healthier environment for those who live in the most densely populated and least green neighborhoods. Support from City Council Members, from sources like the Parks Equity Initiative, A Greener NYC initiative, and local expense funds, has been crucial to NYRP's work in New York's open spaces, and the constituents we all serve.

In our support of New Yorkers and their open space, we know firsthand the impact that investment in gardens and parks has on quality of life, and on communities' resilience. The care of our parks is a fundamental duty that our city owes to all citizens. Social justice includes access to safe, clean, open space, so we must make it a priority to adequately fund New York City Parks operations. We must stabilize City Parks workers' and gardeners' jobs, and invest adequately in their ability to care for land and make necessary improvements. Our parks and gardens are not a luxury. Even with shrunken budgets, parks and gardens yield outsized financial returns in terms of reduced crime, improved public health, storm water management, and improved air quality.

NYRP stands here today with New Yorkers for Parks and the Play Fair Coalition to strongly urge New York City to commit an additional \$200,000,000 to baseline funding for the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation to be able to deliver critical maintenance, and stabilize Parks workers' and gardeners' positions. It is incumbent upon us as New Yorkers to recognize the value of investment in our city's resilience. The spirit of New York City is tough, and to keep it that way we need the City Administration to demonstrate its commitment to its parks and gardens.



Kissena Corridor Park Conservancy, Inc.

A natural park for people, birds and wildlife

P.O. Box 520627, Flushing, NY 11352

KCPconservancy@yahoo.com



Re: Statement for March 13, 2020 City Councils Parks Committee Hearing

Honorable Members,

My name is Dorothy Woo, a member of Kissena Corridor Park Conservancy. We are a Parks advocacy group that has been serving Flushing, Queens Community Since 2006. We work with the Parks to maintain and develop the open spaces Of Kissena Corridor Park for passive recreation. We engage neighborhood residents through park beautification projects, conservation efforts and public education.

I would like to thank our Councilman Koo and the former Borough President Katz for funding the meditation garden, and the Mayor de Blasio's funding for security lights to be installed throughout our park. In addition of the ongoing and planned capital projects for our park, there is more that we need for each year.

We need maintenance for weeding out invasive plants along pathways for safe passage. We need tree experts to care for trees that we planted during the Million Trees Initiative 10 years ago. These services are important to our neighborhood.

We feel strongly that we must learn from the past and avoid another 40 years of park underdevelopment which led to the numerous crimes in our park, invited by our own neglect. A well-maintained park is essential for the health of our neighborhood and is a cost effective contributor to our community and the City as a whole. I would like to take this opportunity to ask the Council to secure the much need maintenance and operation funding to NYC parks with a fair budget appropriation.

Thank you.


Dorothy Woo

140-28 Holly Avenue, Flushing, NY 11355

Tel: 718-762-6383 Email: dlwoo@msn.com



**New York City Council
Preliminary Budget Hearing - Parks and Recreation
March 13, 2020**

Testimony By: Sarah Charlop-Powers, Natural Areas Conservancy, Executive Director

My name is Sarah Charlop-Powers and I am the Executive Director of the Natural Areas Conservancy. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony about the proposed FY21 budget. The Natural Areas Conservancy is a nonprofit organization that was formed in 2012 with the goal of increasing the capacity of NYC Parks and its partners to restore and manage the 10,000 acres of forests and wetlands under the agency's jurisdiction. A signature project of our organization was the development of the "Forest Management Framework for New York City", which we released in partnership with NYC Parks in Spring 2018. This plan takes a comprehensive look at the condition of our city's natural forests and outlines the investment needed to manage them over the next 25 years.

I want to commend the leadership of Speaker Johnson, NYC Council and Mayor DeBlasio in 2019 resulting in the addition of \$43 million of expense funding for NYC Parks, including \$4 million to support the management of 7,300 acres of forested natural areas. This funding has been used to implement the first year of recommendations from the Forest Management Framework. Already in fiscal year 2020, these funds have supported the planting of more than 20,000 new trees and shrubs, the engagement of over 2,000 volunteers, improvements to nearly 40 miles of trails, and restoration efforts that have impacted over 900 acres of parkland.

I am here today to express the Natural Areas Conservancy's strong support for the 2nd year of Play Fair, specifically the allocation of \$100 million in expense funding and \$100 million in capital investments for NYC Parks. These funds represent a crucial investment in one of New York City's most important pieces of public infrastructure. The \$100 million request includes support for maintenance and operations, expanded recreation and public programming, increased public safety, and continued investment in nature and resiliency.

It is imperative that the \$4 million investment to manage forests made in FY20 be repeated in FY21. This continued investment in New York City's natural forests is an investment in our city's future. Caring for our forests makes NYC more resilient, including cooling our city during extreme heat events and buffering our coastal areas. These funds support improvements to trails in parks across the city, making nature more accessible to New Yorkers. And, this funding is needed to extend the employment of the 47 new Natural Resource Group staff who were hired to care for forests in FY20.

It is also critical that the Parks Department receive a new 10 year capital allocation of \$3.8 million per year to support forest restoration. Since 2007, the City has invested \$3.5 million per year in natural areas forest restoration. Current funding runs out at the end of FY20, and allocating new funds is essential to continue this work.

Thank you again for your leadership and for the opportunity to express our support for increased investment in NYC Parks.



Hon. Peter Koo, Chair
NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
Councilmembers: Rivera, Levine, Cohen, Gjonaj, Moya, Van Bramer, Adams,
Holden, Ulrich, Brannan and Borelli.

March 13th, 2020

Dear Chairperson:

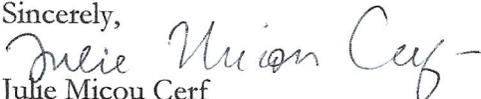
Re: Testimony for the NYC City Council Parks FY201 Budget Hearing

The Van Cortlandt Park Alliance would like to submit this testimony in support of the New Yorkers for Parks' (NY4P) Play Fair Campaign requesting additional funding for NYC Parks. The Van Cortlandt Park Alliance preserves, supports, and promotes the recreational, ecological, and historical value of Van Cortlandt Park.

We all know that NYC Parks is underfunded. They have been for many many years and this needs to change. There is not enough personnel and working equipment to properly maintain our parks at a level that our park users deserve. For example, in the Bronx our vehicles such as garbage packers and lawn mowers spend about as much time in the repair shop as they do out in the parks. When our comfort stations breakdown we have to wait for one of 4 Bronx plumbers to have time to fix it. This has resulted in our main comfort station for Cross Country Races being closed during major events.

To address these issues and other in parks throughout NYC, the Alliance supports NY4P's Play Fair Campaign and are requesting the City to commit an additional \$100 million to invest in the staffing needed to adequately maintenance and operate our Parks. This request includes the \$10 million needed to baseline the 100 City Park Worker and 50 Gardener positions. Thank you for funding these position last year but now is the time to baseline them so we don't have to beg each year. In addition, we are asking for another \$100 million in Capital Investments which is just a drop in the bucket of capital improvements needed by our parks.

The Van Cortlandt Park Alliance fully supports the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and its efforts to maintain and improve all parks in NYC. It is important to the future of NYC that we fund our Parks.

Sincerely,

Julie Micou Cerf
Interim Executive Director

Board Members

Carol J. Samol, *Co-Chair*
Nina Habib Spencer, *Co-Chair*
Gary Axelbank
Robert Baron
Claudia Bonn
Linda Cox
Dr. Thomas M. Kelly
Rabbi Binyamin Krauss
Holly Leicht
Dr. Brennan O'Donnell
Amit Stern
Teresa Grant Stoeth
Stacey Wieder

Ex-Officio Members

Hon. Andrew Cohen,
NYC Council District 11
Iris Rodriguez-Rosa,
Bronx Borough Parks
Commissioner

March 13, 2020

TESTIMONY OF FRIENDS OF DAG HAMMARSKJOLD PLAZA

DAG HAMMARSKJOLD PLAZA, MANHATTAN, EAST 47TH STREET, BETW. 1ST & 2ND AVES.

The Friends of Dag Hammarskjold Plaza join the PlayFair campaign as members of the 230-strong coalition calling for increased city funding to support improved park maintenance, public health and safety. Although the campaign produced tangible gains last year, half-a percent of city funding remains woefully inadequate to operate a city agency that continues to build new parks and acquire more parkland without a substantial increase in funding for maintenance and operations of one of the nation's largest park systems.

As the city struggles to contain the COVID-19 contagion, plunging markets and shuttered businesses, PUBLIC HEALTH looms as the Number One concern. HOW WE MANAGE PUBLIC SPACE is key to survival, quality of life and property values. City government must ensure healthy, safe parks. As more New Yorkers are confined to their apartments with few options for public gatherings, our parks provide the outdoor recreation, fresh air and green sanctuaries for social interaction, farmers markets, quiet contemplation, recreation and fitness, strengthening our collective and individual immune systems in a green environment.

Trees are the lungs of our city; and the 1.5 acre Hammarskjold park includes the tree-lined Plaza and its Katharine Hepburn Garden, the largest public garden on the east side of midtown Manhattan. **The public/private partnership has been vital to the park's transformation from a dangerous, neglected eyesore to achieving the midtown oasis we enjoy today.**

Our nonprofit 501c3 organization raises funds, contracts labor, produces programming and recruits volunteers to help keep this historic town square and Gateway to the United Nations, clean, green and safe. We are witness to the dedication of DPR, an agency overwhelmed by the demands of maintaining complex infrastructure and responding to the needs of community park associations which provide valuable resources but lack the autonomy of big park conservancies. We experience frustrating bottlenecks and delays in project approvals, processing city council grants, and navigating a complex bureaucracy. The fault rests not with the agency but the lack of city funding for administrative staff and trained labor. Volunteers are no substitute for engineers, gardeners, plumbers, tree pruners, park custodians, rangers, PEP officers, recreation directors and boots on the ground to keep our parks clean, green and safe.

For 20 years following Hammarskjold Plaza's reconstruction, we have contracted the Doe Fund to empty the park's 20 trash bins twice daily. In addition, we contract labor to clean the park's six fountains and provide irrigation and landscaping services. City Council's 30 percent restriction on grant funding for subcontracted labor now curtails cleanliness and sanitation efforts at a time when labor costs have skyrocketed and the homeless population is rising. **A park that serves as the city's primary site for UN protests, the epicenter for the first Women's March and many other parades, presents outsized cleaning costs and safety/security risks. Never before have the stakes been so high, and we stand together for City Government to Play Fair!**

Sherrill Kazan, President

Anne Hersh, Director of Development fdhp@hammarskjoldplaza.org

#PlayFair

Dear Parks Council,

I represent Friends of Mosholu Parkland where I serve as Education Director, and Friends of Williamsbridge Oval where I am a participating member. I would like to state that what is very apparent that the funds have done for The Oval is two full-time gardeners for this 20-acre park. We have not had a Gardner in a few years. You can see the overall care has risen and it impacts on the parks. When you walk in it's a welcoming cared for environment. It is far superior to what a few volunteers can commit to sporadically.

There needs to be a commitment on the Parkland as well. There is much work to be done in this location. We have done a visioning, and funds for ongoing youth and school programming activities would be a great help as well.

Thank you for the funds and Thanks to the NY4P initiative and continued support.

Respectfully,

Lorita Watson, MS
<lorita.watson@nyu.edu>

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Education: that which reveals to the wise, and conceals from the stupid, the vast limits of their knowledge.

Mark Twain



Testimony of the American Heart Association

Before the New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

March 13, 2020

Greg Mihailovich, Director, Grassroots Advocacy
American Heart Association, New York City

Thank you, Chair Koo and the members of the Council Committee on Parks and Recreation, for the opportunity to discuss a key budget priority the American Heart Association believes would benefit the City of New York.

The American Heart Association is the nation's oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke, of which approximately 80% of diagnoses are preventable.ⁱ Accordingly, AHA prioritizes increasing physical activity and physical fitness across the population because engaging in daily physical activity reduces the risk of obesity, coronary heart disease, stroke, hypertension, diabetes, and some types of cancer.ⁱⁱ

The Play Fair Coalition has brought attention to the funding needs of NYC Parks. This ongoing conversation is important to have because well-maintained parks contribute to a higher quality of life for all New Yorkers. As that conversation continues, we need to identify and support projects that make it easier for all of us to be physically active. Promoting active transportation -- the opportunity to bike, walk, or roll to work, school, or around the community -- through policy, systems and environmental change is one of the leading evidence-based strategies to increase physical activity across the lifespan.ⁱⁱⁱ

The American Heart Association recommends at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity at least five days a week for overall cardiovascular health, and an average of 40 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous-intensity three or four days a week to help lower blood pressure and cholesterol. New Yorkers get a significant amount of this recommended daily physical activity from participating in active transportation.^{iv} Manhattan's Hudson River Greenway is the most heavily used bikeway in the United States—nearly 7,000 people ride a bike there every day.^v The New Springville Greenway is a 3.2-mile multi-use path along the edge of Fresh Kills Park on Staten Island. The Greenway was finished in 2015 and is already seeing 6,000 users per month on average.^{vi} That number will go up when the park is completed and open to the public. When we invest in this active living infrastructure, people use it.

Greenways also provide benefits beyond the physical. Stress can affect your mental and physical health in many ways. Long-term activation of your body's stress response system may put you at risk for health troubles like digestive problems, anxiety, headaches, depression, sleep problems, weight gain, memory and concentration issues, high blood pressure, and heart

disease and stroke.^{vii} ^{viii} Spending non-active time outside in nature can help lower your stress and result in better health outcomes.^{ix}

The American Heart Association applauds New York City's continued efforts to prioritize active living infrastructure. The dedication of funding by Mayor de Blasio to close two of the major gaps on the east side of the Manhattan Greenway will create a safe walking, running, and biking path for many residents of Manhattan and the South Bronx. The Council also secured \$1.25 million in funding to rehabilitate the Long Island/Vanderbilt Motor Parkway, which is a key part of the proposed Eastern Queens Greenway that would create a safe and continuous connection between many of Queens' wonderful parks. As we progress through this budget cycle, we ask that the NYC Council continue to identify and fund these NYC Parks infrastructure projects so that everyone has optimal access to active living opportunities. There are some notable opportunities to improve Greenway connectivity throughout New York City:

- Manhattan: between 145th Street and 162nd Street on the east side
- Brooklyn: several gaps on the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway in Greenpoint, DUMBO, Red Hook, Sunset Park, Gravesend and Sheepshead Bay
- Queens: several gaps on the Eastern Queens Greenway from Flushing Meadows to Alley Pond Park and the Joe Michaels Mile
- The Bronx: remaining gaps in the Bronx River Greenway
- Staten Island: on the North Shore between Fort Wadsworth and the Bayonne and Goethals Bridges, and mid-Island connections to the New Springville Greenway

By prioritizing investment in quality outdoor recreation and safe active transportation in the Fiscal Year 2021 budget, you can help millions of New Yorkers live longer and healthier lives.

ⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Preventable Deaths from heart Disease & Stroke <http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/HeartDisease-Stroke/index.html>

ⁱⁱ Spengler JO. Promoting Physical Activity through Shared Use of School and Community Recreational Resources. Research Brief. Active Living Research, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, April 2012. Available at: http://activelivingresearch.org/files/ALR_Brief_SharedUse_April2012.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Nazelle A, Nieuwenhuijsen JM, Anto, et al. Improving health through policies that promote active travel: A review of evidence to support integrated health impact assessment. *Environ Int.* 2011. May; 37(4): 766-777.

^{iv} NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Health Benefits of Active Transportation in New York City. May 2011. www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/survey/survey-2011active-transport.pdf

^v NYC Dept. of Transportation. "About Greenways," NYC.gov. <http://a841-tfpweb.nyc.gov/greenway/background/>

^{vi} Freshkills Park Alliance. "Counting New Springville Greenway Visitors" <https://freshkillspark.org/blog/counting-new-springville-greenway-visitors>

^{vii} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health, Stress and your health <https://www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/stress-and-your-health>

^{viii} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Coping with Stress <https://www.cdc.gov/Features/CopingWithStress/index.html>.

^{ix} McMahan EA, Estes D. The effect of contact with natural environments on positive and negative affect: A meta-analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology.* 2015;10(6):507-519. doi: 10.1080/17439760.2014.994224.

Play fair

The fresh Creek Nature Association need the continued support to restore the National Preserve and to keep funding our parks in Canarsie Brooklyn.

Regards
Maria Garrett
President FCNA

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Regards,
Maria Garrett
Fresh Creek Nature Association
freshcreekassociation@gmail.com



March 13, 2020

**Testimony to the City Council Committee on Parks
Submitted by Sarita Daftary, Senior Community Organizer, JLUSA**

Dear Council Member Koo and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and your leadership on this issue. I'm an organizer with JustLeadershipUSA, working on the #CLOSErikers campaign. Today I want to speak about the opportunities New York City has to immediately invest in the types of community resources that can create safety by strengthening and stabilizing communities. But so far, New York City is not taking those opportunities. **We can fund our parks and our communities, even with budget cuts from the state, by beginning the long-overdue work of divesting from overfunded systems of law enforcement.**

New York City has prided itself on uplifting the values of equality, fairness and respect for its 8 million residents, but the way New York City spends money does not match those values.

Each budget cycle, New Yorkers passionately and articulately make the case for desperately-needed funding for housing, education, libraries, healthcare, youth programs, parks and more. In each budget cycle, they walk away with only a fraction of what is needed. Every time that happens, gaping holes widen in our social safety net, and law enforcement agencies are once again relied upon to respond to challenges they will never be equipped to address - challenges of public health, poverty, and inequality.

This is a choice, and our electeds have the power to make a different choice. The choices that created this misalignment in budget priorities have had serious and sometimes deadly consequences. While we are well aware that the State and Federal government have contributed to funding gaps, the truth is that New York City has the resources to address many of the needs that currently go unmet. With vision and political courage, we can move those resources to where they are truly needed. **The Mayor and City Council will need to decide that our city will once and for all stop relying on law enforcement agencies to address social problems.** You must develop and implement bold plans to fund community resources and infrastructure *to scale*, and in doing so, create new living wage jobs in the social and human services sector. **Only by making this shift can New York City truly end the tale of two cities.** This shift will not be completed in this budget cycle alone, but New York City must start this process, and we can lead the nation in doing so.

Decades of mass incarceration have taken so many resources from Black, Brown, and poor communities. We all want to live in strong, safe, healthy neighborhoods, and our communities have had the solutions for a long time, but not the support. The #buildCOMMUNITIES platform explains these solutions. It was

launched in January 2019 and updated this month, draws on the collective wisdom of over 40 organizations and more than 200 residents of communities most impacted by mass incarceration. The platform highlights areas of need, as well as many programs that are already working, but in dire need of greater investment. I'm pleased to share a copy of that platform with you today.

One particular need that I want to highlight today is investment in our parks. **In the conversations we had with residents across the City, people repeatedly mentioned parks as valuable assets in need of more support. They also mentioned parks as spaces which, when well-maintained, are places for people to gather and build the kinds of connections with their neighbors that truly make our City safe. The Play Fair Coalition's call for increased staffing for maintenance and operations in parks across the City is not only a solution for our parks, it is also a solution that creates jobs.** New York City has been reducing its jail population, and must continue to, and now is finally starting to reduce the number of people employed as correctional officers. Instead of approaching this weakly, and letting that workforce shrink only by attrition, the City should be proactively looking at the agencies that need more staff - like the Parks Department - and proactively planning a workforce transition.

We know that your committee would like to meet the full funding need for Parks maintenance. And what we want to emphasize is that New York City CAN. This year's budget allocates over \$14 billion dollars to the New York City Police Department, the Department of Corrections, the New York City Department of Probation, and District Attorneys, including over \$1.2 billion for over 5,000 excess correction officers.

We need you, the Council members who understand the importance of resourcing other priorities, to urge the Mayor to make the boldest step he can towards a truly safer, fairer, and more progressive City.

Sincerely,

Sarita Daftary
JustLeadershipUSA



#build**COMMUNITIES**

PLATFORM 2.0

F E B R U A R Y 2 0 2 0

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Vision

For the members of JustLeadershipUSA and our partners, our demand to #CLOSErikers and has always been deeply tied to a vision for using funds that will be saved by decarceration to make long-overdue investments to build communities. We reject the reliance on a race- and poverty-based system of policing and punishment that characterizes the current failed approach to ‘safety’ on a city, state, and national level. We know that true safety is fostered in well-resourced communities, and that New York City is undoubtedly capable of providing that support to our communities. New York City is often hailed, by the Mayor and others, as services- and resource-rich. It is true that resources exist, but the struggles of too many New Yorkers show us clearly that enormous gaps remain. Certainly, services and resources at the community level have never been funded at the levels that law enforcement agencies are (and long have been).

Here, we have drawn on the work and vision of over 60 partners and advisors from more than 30 partner organizations and groups, along with more than 200 individuals representing families and communities worst impacted by incarceration. Our conversations about these investments started with thinking about the money that will be saved by closing Rikers -- over \$1 billion per year, as estimated by the [Lippman Commission](#). However, we quickly recognized that it is not only the Department of Corrections that is over-resourced, but all elements of law enforcement, including the New York City Police Department, the New York City Department of Probation, and our courts. Our City pumps over \$14 billion dollars annually into these agencies and charges them with solving problems they will never be equipped to address. In doing so, our City applies law enforcement solutions to problems of public health, poverty, and inequality. It hasn’t worked, and it will never work.

We are proud and excited to present this updated #buildCOMMUNITIES platform as a roadmap for New York City to make a bold shift from the status quo to a city that lives our values of equity and justice by acknowledging the vast resources that decades of mass incarceration have extracted from Black, Brown, and poor communities, and starting *today* to address that legacy by investing in all of the things that we know work to create *true* safety.

Process

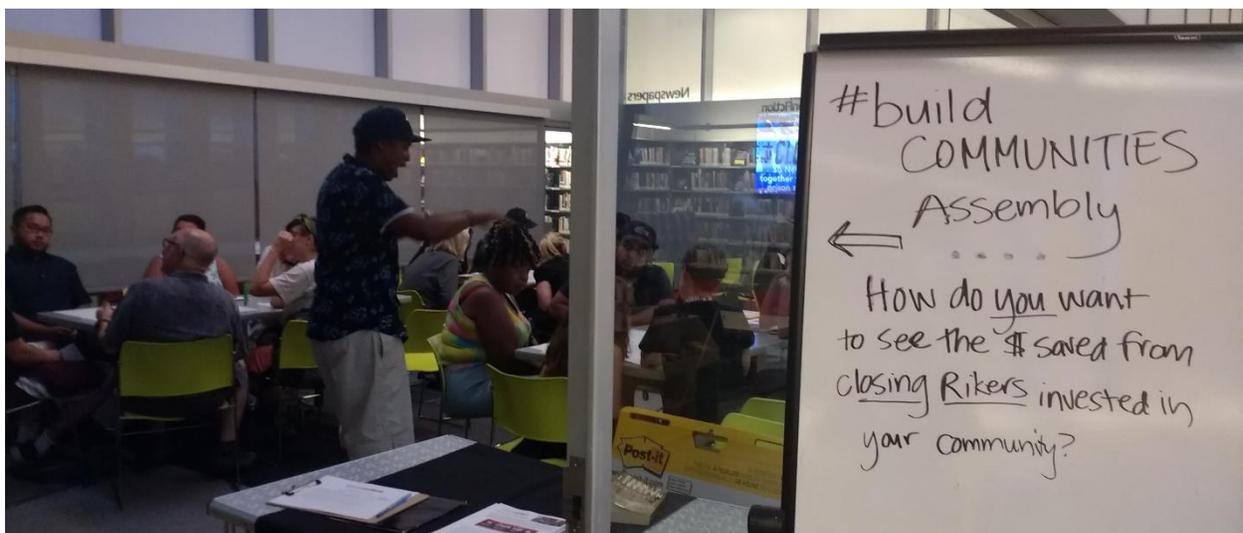
This platform was built by a collaboration of directly impacted people and communities, as well as a range of partner organizations and advisors. We are grateful to all of them for their invaluable contributions to this vision.

- From June to July 2018, over 50 members of more than 30 partner organizations (formal and informal) met in eight issue-based subcommittees (*Employment & Economic Development; Housing; Mental Health & Counseling; Substance Use; Conflict Mediation & Alternative Accountability; Education & Schools; Youth, Family & Recreational Services; Health, Wellness & Environmental Justice*). Other organizations and individuals offered insights through follow-up conversations. These partners and advisors include:
 - Arab American Association of New York
 - Bronx Defenders*
 - Brooklyn Movement Center
 - Brotherhood/Sister Sol*
 - Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services
 - Center for Educational Equity
 - Center for Health Equity, New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene
 - Center for Justice at Columbia University
 - Children's Defense Fund
 - College and Community Fellowship
 - Community Access
 - Community Service Society of New York
 - Community Voices Heard
 - Cooperative Economic Alliance of New York City
 - Corporation for Supportive Housing
 - CUNY School of Public Health
 - Dignity in Schools Campaign
 - DriveChange*
 - Drug Policy Alliance
 - Dyslexia Plus Task Force
 - Getting Out and Staying Out
 - Grand Street Settlement
 - Harm Reduction Coalition*
 - John Jay College, From Punishment to Public Health*
 - Legal Action Center
 - Legal Aid Society, Prisoners Rights Project
 - Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts of New York
 - Neighbors in Action*
 - New Economy Project
 - New York Academy of Medicine
 - New York City Employment and Training Coalition

- New York City Environmental Justice Alliance
- New York City Network of Worker Cooperatives
- New York Harm Reduction Educators
- New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, Disability Justice Program
- New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, Environmental Justice Program*
- New Yorkers for Parks
- Open Society Foundations
- Safe Horizon
- St. Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction
- Supportive Housing Network of New York
- United Community Centers
- Urban Justice Center Mental Health Project*
- VOCAL-NY
- West Side Commons*

**Indicates an organization that convened a subcommittee*

- From June to August 2018, 210 individuals joined in assemblies in eight communities most impacted by mass incarceration (*Bed-Stuy/Crown Heights, Stapleton, Jamaica, Brownsville/East New York, Hunts Point, Mott Haven, Tremont, Harlem*). Partners who hosted these assemblies include:
 - Brooklyn Movement Center
 - East Harlem Health Action Center
 - Grand Street Settlement, Unity Plaza Community Center
 - Mott Haven Reformed Church
 - Neighborhood Benches
 - New York Public Library, Stapleton Branch
 - The Point CDC



#buildCOMMUNITIES Assembly at Stapleton Library, Staten Island. July 2018.

- JLUSA’s membership of formerly incarcerated people and their loved ones have for years amplified the need for community reinvestment. They weighed in formally and informally with their ideas and vision throughout this process.
- In Fall 2018, a working group convened to review all of the input gathered through this process, and synthesize it into a set of clear and urgent demands for reinvestment from the City government. This working group and set of co-authors includes:
 - Ashley Viruet, The West Side Commons
 - Darren Mack, JLUSA and #CLOSErikers launching member
 - Halimah Washington, JLUSA member
 - Marco Barrios, JLUSA member
 - Marsha Jean-Charles, Brotherhood/Sister Sol
 - Megan French-Marcelin, JLUSA
 - Monica Novoa, JLUSA
 - Rosa Jaffe, Urban Justice Center Mental Health Project
 - Sarita Daftary-Steel, JLUSA
 - Shana Russell, Humanities Action Lab at Rutgers University
 - Theresa Sweeney, JLUSA and #CLOSErikers launching member
 - Vidal Guzman, JLUSA and #CLOSErikers launching member

In the winter of 2019/2020, we updated this platform through follow-up conversations with the above contributors. In the following pages, we outline our vision and demands for investments in the areas of Public Health, Housing, Employment & Economic Development, Education & Schools, Community Programs & Services, and Conflict Transformation & Alternative Accountability, as well as ways in which the Structure of Investments must be transformed.

Illustrations by Crystal Clarity



Public Health

Invest in the well-being of our communities to address ill health exacerbated by systemic racism, poverty, discrimination, criminalization, and gentrification.

Our bloated criminal punishment system reflects a historical and continuing lack of investment in the health and well-being of people and communities. While our public health system and institutions are starved for resources, incarceration is used to ‘treat’ mental and behavioral health needs, substance dependency, physical health needs, and violence. Punitive responses will never address the root causes of these issues. Punitive responses are not even effective in ‘managing’ or ‘containing’ these problems, as interaction with our dehumanizing criminal punishment system leads to further deterioration of mental and physical health.

Demands

1. Provide free, quality, community-based mental health services that are preventative and responsive to mental health crises. Services should be provided both in brick-and-mortar centers (like community trauma or healing centers), and in ways that proactively reach the community through canvassing, training, and meeting people where they are at. Mental health treatment and services must be provided outside of the carceral system, should engage peers (people with lived experience) and local community members in paid roles, and should prioritize non-mandated and non-coercive approaches.³
 - a. Expand site-based treatment
 - Build the two diversion centers already planned, and provide additional funding for a minimum of two centers in each borough.
 - Sustain funding for peer-run mental health [Crisis Respite Centers](#),⁴ and create two more
 - Eight Crisis Respite Centers⁵ currently serve New York City, with a total capacity for 64 people.
 - Queens and Manhattan each need at least one more Crisis Respite Center. The Queens respite center should be in Jamaica, well-served by transportation. The Manhattan respite center should be in an area of upper Manhattan well-served by public transportation.
 - Each center must be ADA compliant. Only one existing center is.
 - The referral process for Crisis Respite Centers should be changed to remove barriers to access. Anyone, including a family member, peer, program staff, therapist, doctor, should be able to refer a person who would like to utilize a respite center. The Crisis Respite Center will then do its intake as normal.
 - Create five Mental Health Urgent Care clinics
 - Open one mental health urgent care stand-alone clinic in each borough. While these clinics exist for those with private insurance,⁶ there is currently no public option.
 - Clinics should offer 24 hour, walk-in, mental and behavioral health services.
 - Clinics should be staffed at any given time by a psychiatrist, a nurse, a therapist, and a couple of peers.
 - The City should convene a group of Health and Hospitals Corporation staff, mental health advocates, and people with lived experience to develop specific plans for the urgent care centers.
 - Create four more Support and Connection Centers (previously called Health Diversion Centers) with expanded eligibility

- After many delays, two Support and Connection Centers (with a total of 40-50 beds, serving up to 2,400 people per year)⁷ will open in February 2020. While New York City is just starting to develop these centers, they have been an important part of the mental health and crisis management landscape in Los Angeles for a long time.
 - The City should create four more diversion centers in the short term - with centers sited in the precincts that log the highest numbers of mental health calls for people in crisis.⁸
 - The current guidelines give police discretion over who is brought to a diversion center, and allow them to exclude people whose behavior could be grounds for a felony charge.
 - Police discretion should be minimized, given the well-documented patterns of racial bias⁹ in policing. These biases, and police discretion, could lead to Black and Brown people being perceived as more threatening and less deserving of diversion.
 - Eligibility should not exclude people who could be charged with a felony, but should rather be based on an observation of symptoms of mental distress, with criteria informed by peer specialist and mental health professionals.
 - If Emergency Medical Services (EMS) arrives on the scene, they should transport people to diversion centers rather than police, if this does not delay transportation to a diversion center.
 - Staffing for these centers should ensure that there are peer specialists on staff during every shift (twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week).
 - This would require an investment of approximately \$20 million annually (\$5 million per center x 4 centers).
 - The City can utilize existing, vacant Department of Health buildings, or invest in existing community-based organizations, to develop the above-mentioned centers.
- b. Expand field-based treatment
- Fund more mobile, intensive case management, modeled on [Assertive Community Treatment](#) (ACT) teams,¹⁰ with expanded eligibility.
 - Eligibility should include those currently eligible for ACT *and* people with substance use disorders, personality disorders, cognitive and developmental disabilities, and history of severe trauma.
 - With the flexibility of City (rather than State funding) clients can also keep their ACT team assignment even if they are incarcerated or unreachable for a period of more than 90 days.
 - The City should fund at least 10 additional teams with capacity to serve 680 people. This expanded capacity could address the current waiting list (approximately 500) and some of the additional demand that would come from expanded eligibility.
 - This would require an investment of \$10.5 million (\$1,055,000 per team x 10 teams), plus additional funds to build capacity at the

Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to manage a larger number of teams.

- Continue support for [Intensive Mobile Treatment](#) (IMT) teams.¹¹
 - IMT teams have been very effective in meeting the needs of clients who are often hardest to reach, including people who live in unstable housing or are unsheltered.
 - Address recruitment and retention challenges among field-based treatment teams
 - Fund pathways for workforce development, with a focus on recruiting more people of color and people with lived experience.
 - Assess salaries and increase compensation (and total budget per team) to ensure salaries competitive enough to attract and retain skilled people.
 - Offer resources for self-care, including addressing vicarious trauma, burnout, and workplace environment
 - c. Expand investment in [Mobile Crisis Teams](#)² to a level sufficient to enable them to replace the police as first-responders to calls involving mental health crises, as recommended by the Mayor's Behavioral Health Task Force and the Office of the Public Advocate.¹³
2. Expand effective housing options for people with mental health concerns and other supportive housing needs [see 'Housing' section for more detail].
 3. Support and expand prosocial programs like clubhouses with supportive employment, which do not require individuals to be in active recovery.¹⁴
 4. Further invest in harm reduction.
 - Fully fund the implementation of Local Law 225 to provide naloxone training to shelter staff and residents.
 - a. Pass and fully fund Intro 1190 to provide Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) in shelters.
 - b. Fund mobile medical teams to provide MAT to people living on the streets.
 - c. Establish at least one safer injection site in each borough, and limit law enforcement interaction around them. Pilot sites are currently planned in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and two in the Bronx, and should be expanded in the future, building on lessons from these sites.
 - d. Continue and expand support for community education campaigns to de-stigmatize substance use, people who use substances, treatment, and harm reduction services. Include education across a spectrum of safer use, managed use, and abstinence. Also include education on the details of the [911 Good Samaritan Law](#).¹⁵
 - e. Create funding streams to promote focus groups and one-on-one interviews with participants/clients of harm reduction and treatment programs (and other people who use drugs), to learn what they need in order to avoid law enforcement interaction and build trust with community members and providers.
 - f. Create funding streams specific to harm reduction programs, including funding that allows for the hiring and professional development of directly impacted people.
 - g. Expand funding to harm reduction services including health hubs, drop-in and on-demand treatment services, and low-barrier community healthcare clinics that prioritize non-mandated and non-coercive approaches.
 - h. Expand, improve, and destigmatize methadone clinics and reduce law enforcement interaction around them. Support initiatives that help methadone clinics to be seen as

- clinical providers, such as including them in referral networks and health-resource directories, and dedicate funding for additional services at methadone clinics, including drop-in space for clients
5. Invest in workforce development to appropriately staff all supportive or treatment facilities, including recruiting Black and Brown leaders in the healthcare industry.
 - a. Negotiate with payers (State Medicaid and insurance companies) to reimburse for the work of community health workers and peers at a higher rate.
 - b. Support initiatives to provide Black and Brown leaders with the necessary education and training to attain leadership positions in the healthcare industry.
 6. Provide access to low- or no-cost healthcare at a community level, offering a holistic range of services including mental health, sexual health, dental health, wellness (including mindfulness and meditation), and preventative services.
 - a. Expand [Neighborhood Health Action Centers](#),¹⁶ including the three pending (in Central Harlem, Morrisania, and Bedford-Stuyvesant), and establish one each in Queens and Staten Island as well.
 - b. Expand school-based wellness centers.
 - c. Invest in mobile health clinics, and more and improved hospitals throughout the City.
 7. Remove and address environmental burdens.
 - a. Pass the package of Renewable Rikers bills (Intros 1591, 1592, and 1593) that would transfer Rikers Island to the Department of Environmental Protection and initiate studies on how best to use the island for green infrastructure. Re-use of Rikers could include the following projects:
 - Redesign the water treatment system so the South Bronx plant can be relocated on Rikers Island.
 - Build a large anaerobic digester to work in tandem with a water treatment plant, expanding the City's capacity to process organic waste without burdening any community. No other waste-to-energy facility should be sited at Rikers Island other than the anaerobic digester.
 - Build a marine transfer station at Rikers, and modernize Hunts Point Marine Transfer Station, so barges can bring organic waste directly from Hunts Point market, and from other municipal marine transfer stations, to Rikers Island without use of trucks.
 - Expand existing composting on Rikers Island.
 - Build a solar farm on Rikers Island.
 - Where land in the South Bronx is made available by closing The Boat and relocating its water treatment plant, invest in developing this land as parks or green space that adds to physical activity opportunities and overall wellness.
 - In all living wage green jobs created by these initiatives, prioritize hiring residents of communities most impacted by mass incarceration and most excluded from employment.
 8. Improve access to fresh food, water, and health promoting resources.
 - a. Further invest in community gardens by halting all sales of gardens for private development, expanding supports available through the New York City Parks Department's [Green Thumb Program](#)¹⁷ (infrastructure, supplies, and technical assistance), and establishing a land trust to purchase land for active gardens that are operating on privately owned land.

- b. Expand economic assistance and incentive programs for bodegas and family owned stores to offer healthier options, such as establishing a subsidized delivery service to help small stores source healthier options.

What's Working

[The Arab American Association of New York's Mental Health Services](#)¹⁸ program is operated in collaboration with Connections to Care (C2C) Program. C2C, part of [ThriveNYC](#),¹⁹ partners with community-based organizations to provide culturally and linguistically sensitive mental health services. All AAANY staff are trained on Mental Health First Aid, Screening, Motivational Interviewing and Psychoeducation, and paired with trained mental health providers at NYU Lutheran to address mental health needs beyond the capacity of staff.

Intensive Mobile Treatment (IMT) teams were established in New York City in 2015 as part of the [NYC Safe Initiative](#).²⁰ This form of field-based treatment is designed to serve adults with recent and frequent contact with the mental health, substance use, criminal legal, and homeless services systems. The teams are designed to be mobile, flexible and interdisciplinary -- to proactively reach people where they are at, with the flexibility to meet their needs. Staffing for each team includes a Program Director, 2 Peer Counselors, 3 Behavioral Health Specialists, a Registered Nurse, a Psychiatrist, and a Program Administrator. Each team serves 27 clients - a lower ratio of clients to staff than Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams. Because IMT teams use City funds and have more generous budgets for clients services, they are not reliant on Medicaid billing. One IMT provider described a client who told them what he really needed was a bicycle. They were able to buy him one, and saw that his mental health and stability improved. New York City currently has seven IMT teams, and committed in October 2019 to adding four more.²¹

[VOCAL-NY's Care Coordination](#) services connect people who use drugs to health and wellness services that they need and deserve. They offer referrals to trustworthy, respectful providers for services: HIV, STI and hepatitis C testing and treatment, housing placement and assistance, insurance enrollment, food pantries and soup kitchens, drug treatment including methadone and suboxone, medical services, mental health services, and legal services. By providing caring, individualized support from a team of people with training and lived experience (including staff, social workers, peers, and partners in medical institutions) VOCAL has helped many people lead more stable lives and avoid contact with the criminal legal system. It has meant that they have the ability to accompany people to court and advocate for programs that would actually benefit them; to walk people through the process of applying for NYC's housing lottery; and when someone is taken into Department of Corrections custody, to contact Correctional Health Services and advocate for them. With more funding, they could expand their team to ensure that case managers work with no more than 30 clients, and to bring on team members who specialize in helping people access specific services.



Housing

Invest in safe, stable, and dignified housing as a human right for all New Yorkers.

Stable housing is a critical pillar of a stable life, yet in New York City, it is increasingly out of reach. Discrimination and skyrocketing housing costs have combined to make it nearly impossible to find housing in the private market, while lack of investment and oversight at all levels of government have made subsidized or regulated housing increasingly hard to secure and to live in comfortably. Worse yet, the working class people of color who endured decades of disinvestment, abandonment, and extraction of human and financial resources through mass criminalization and incarceration, are now being priced out of their neighborhoods as inequitable development projects accelerate across the City. This has produced the worst homelessness crisis since the Great Depression. In addition to being dehumanizing, homelessness is incredibly expensive for the individuals subject to it, and for our City, with extensive NYPD resources devoted to criminalizing homeless.²² We must commit to making the kinds of proactive investments in *true* affordable housing that will enable all New Yorkers to find stable homes and stay in them.

Demands

1. Create, preserve, and maintain true affordable housing.
 - a. Invest at least \$1 billion in crucial improvements in NYCHA, including fixing elevators and lighting, upgrading heating equipment, and addressing lead contamination. These investments must be matched by additional State and Federal investments.
 - b. Double the number of permanent affordable housing units set aside for homeless New Yorkers in the Mayor's [Housing New York 2.0 Plan](#),²³ from 15,000 to 30,000, with 24,000 of these units created through new construction. This plan set forth by the House Our Future NY campaign²⁴ will require the City to build roughly 2,500 new units of homeless housing each year between now and 2026.
 - c. Expand construction of housing which is not owned by for-profit entities, and without restrictions that exclude people with prior convictions.
 - i. Renew and increase funding for the [Community Land Trust Citywide Budget Initiative](#),²⁵ to provide start-up funding to a group of organizations to establish and manage community land trusts.
 - ii. Create a housing trust fund with a dedicated revenue stream to support the creation and preservation of permanently affordable housing for the lowest income New Yorkers. This fund could be supported by a dedicated revenue stream generated by increasing the property taxes on vacant and luxury properties.
 - d. Develop programs to restore vacant properties to active uses that contribute to the supply of affordable housing for low-income New Yorkers, as called for in the [Housing Not Warehousing Act](#).²⁶
 - e. Every development, new or renovated, regardless of subsidies, should have a portion of low-income housing available. Affordability levels should reflect the Area Median Income of the neighborhood in which the buildings exist (not the City as a whole or the NY metro area). [Intro 1211](#),²⁷ passed by the City Council in December 2019, will require developers who receive City financial assistance for new construction of housing development projects to set aside for homeless individuals and families at least 15 percent of dwelling units offered for rent in each housing development project. Development projects that do not receive City subsidies should also be required to include affordable units.
 - f. Barriers to housing for people with records must be removed.
 - . New York City must pass a Fair Chance Housing Act, similar to what Seattle has implemented²⁸. Questions regarding prior convictions should be removed from Housing

Connect applications, and HPD's *Marketing Handbook: Policies and Procedures for Resident Selection and Occupancy*, Section C4b (page 28) must be amended to remove "Criminal history" as a justifiable cause for rejecting an application.

- i. NYCHA policies should be amended to ensure that less people are excluded from public housing, and to expand eligibility for the NYCHA Family Reentry Program²⁹ for people who have been previously excluded. Speaker Corey Johnson's report, [Our Homelessness Crisis: The Case for Change](#), outlines a number of ways to reform NYCHA's exclusion and reentry policies.³⁰
2. Expand and improve services that help people to stay in their homes, such as representation in housing court, rental assistance and arrears programs, and programs to help property owners make repairs & prevent foreclosure
3. For people with mental and behavioral health needs, substance dependencies, personality disorders, cognitive and developmental disabilities, and history of severe trauma, prioritize long-term Supportive Housing
 - a. Develop all Supportive Housing using a Housing First approach to quickly and successfully connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment, or service participation requirements.
 - b. To accelerate the development of units under the [15/15 Supportive Housing Initiative](#)³¹
 - i. Improve flexibility of funding to allow providers to apply for either congregate or scattered site development
 - ii. Conduct a thorough survey of available and underutilized public land, in order to allocate more public land for supportive housing development
 - iii. The City should amend NYC 15/15 to allow people who are homeless who have been incarcerated for 90 days or more to be eligible for these units (assuming they meet other NYC 15/15 eligibility requirements). Currently, the initiative only targets people who meet the Department of Housing and Urban Development's definition of chronically homeless, thereby disqualifying those incarcerated for 90 days or more.³²
 - a. Fund at least 1,000 [Justice-Involved Supportive Housing Units](#).^{33 34} For this funding to be most effective, the City should standardize services and operations funding for all JISH contracts, and increase funding levels for scatter-site housing, or provide for central-site housing, as the current vouchers are insufficient to find housing in the private market.
 - b. Continue to expand housing options for runaway and abandoned youth, by continuing the development of the 1,700 supportive housing units for youth through the 15/15 Supportive Housing Initiative.
 - c. Increase funding rates across all supportive housing programs to match fair market rents.³⁵
 - d. Allocate increased funding to expand training for staff to use harm reduction, trauma-informed and motivational interviewing approaches in supportive housing residences, so that providers do not screen out higher-needs individuals in the interview stage, and also increase oversight of the interview and screening process for supportive housing clients.
 - e. Allocate increased funding to attract and retain staff in supportive housing residences.
 - f. Provide funding and training for 24-hour crisis-response staff at supportive housing sites to prevent unnecessary calls to 911 and involvement of police. We must invest in facilities with the capacity to serve clients refusing to take medication and actively demonstrating aggressive and violent behaviors.
 - g. Include childcare and income support as part of supportive housing arrangements.

What's Working

Through their [integrated housing model, Community Access](#)³⁶ provides permanent supportive housing that mixes families with low income and people with mental health concerns. The model they pioneered brings together different populations, including individuals with psychiatric disabilities, families with low income, veterans, and youth aging out of foster care. The supportive services provided, like counseling, and a range of wellness resources - such as urban farming, exercise and cooking classes, discounted bike-share, and pet adoption - are available to all residents of the building. Community Access currently has units in 21 buildings, with three more in development. Together, there will be 1,732 total tenants; of that 1,140 are tenants with a mental health diagnosis. Eventually, seven properties will have a mix of singles and families, including all the properties currently in their development pipeline. The buildings operate on a Housing First model, and do not require that applicants meet requirements like being substance-free, or taking medications. Their oldest integrated housing project, in the East Village, provides an example of personal and community stability. Of the original 28 families that moved in in 1993, 17 are still there. Community Access maintains a robust tenant advisory group that advises senior staff and creates tenant-led initiatives.

The [Mutual Housing Association of New York \(MHANY\)](#)³⁷ program began as a response to the organizing of squatters who occupied vacant, city-owned sites in the East New York neighborhood of Brooklyn, where the community was confronting an epidemic of landlord abandonment, withdrawal of city services, and illegal evictions by landlords. The Department of Housing Preservation and Development created the program to dispossess abandoned buildings and turn illegal squatters into legal homesteaders. Through negotiations with the squatter population, the city created a separate entity called MHANY and sold the properties to it. MHANY retained land titles to existing sites, and had the legal right to transfer ownership to homesteaders that had worked on the rehabilitation of buildings they occupied. Under HPD rules, homesteaders that chose to sell their property received a limited portion of the resale price. To encourage long-term affordability, MHANY has the first option to purchase the unit and then resell it to a household on the waiting list at a restricted sale price. In addition to the vacant buildings, HPD provided technical assistance, permanent financing, and a portion of construction financing to MHANY cooperatives.



Employment & Economic Development

Invest in programs that support people to achieve economic independence and stability, especially for the people who have been most excluded from opportunities to generate income and build wealth.

In neighborhoods subject to racist policing practices and mass criminalization, vast numbers of people are unemployed, underemployed, and not in the workforce at all. Research has shown that at least 27 percent of formerly incarcerated people are persistently unemployed as a result of structural barriers such as occupational licensing restrictions as well as pervasive racial discrimination. Where Black and brown communities are concerned, levels of unemployment for people with criminal convictions is closer to 40 percent. Communities ravaged by mass criminalization are the same communities that continue to suffer not just from higher rates of unemployment, but lack of access to apprenticeships, employment with meaningful benefits, and wages that ensure the capacity to not simply live check-to-check but build stability within their family and community. Where racial wealth gaps persist and are in many places growing, communities are now subject to further disinvestment and displacement. To maintain and build healthy communities, neighborhoods that have historically been most marginalized from the economy must have pathways into living wage employment and entrepreneurship with real opportunity for mobility.

1. Help New Yorkers to enter skilled trades and living wage, sustainable employment through paid workforce development, including but not limited to training for new roles as mental health workers, credible messengers and other roles needed to expand critical social services and reduce reliance on the criminal justice system; and training for jobs in tech, in healthcare, and green jobs that could be created on Rikers [see Public Health recommendations].
 - a. Implement and fully fund Career Pathways [keep the endnote and link] for all New Yorkers, with added funding focused on increasing both the number and depth of programs, and support providers whose programs are holistic, targeted, and community-responsive.
 - i. This includes the expansion of bridge program funding to \$60 million by expanding programs within DYCD and CUNY, and initiating new ones via HRA, EDC, and WKDEV to enable more New Yorkers with basic skills deficits to access job training programs and career opportunities. Bridge programs provide sector-specific preparation for job training programs along with support to address barriers are preventing individuals from accessing training programs or postsecondary education (such as insufficient math, literacy or English language skills; lack of a required credential or license).
 - b. Embed workforce training into all economic development initiatives, and ensure that investments in the city's growth sectors create equitable career pathways for all New Yorkers. Economic development initiatives such as those supported and managed by the Economic Development Corporation should include workforce training as a funded component, and detail how private sector partners will proactively connect local residents to trainings and the jobs created by the initiative.
 - c. Streamline oversight of the workforce system
 - d. Make tax credits to new industries contingent on offering set-asides of at least 15% for members of the local community.
 - e. Set aside a portion of all City jobs for people with barriers to employment like a prior conviction, unstable housing, or attendance at underperforming schools.
 - f. Provide funding to cover fees for occupational licenses.
 - g. Provide all workplaces with resource guides and posters to help employees connect to services they may need to be consistent in their jobs, like reduced-price MetroCards, free mental and physical health services, applications for HousingConnect, and more.

2. Establish a Universal Summer Internships and Youth Jobs program,³⁹ to expand summer job opportunities to accommodate all young people who want to work, while improving the structure and effectiveness of the program.
3. Expand support for small businesses, focused on historically excluded people and communities in particular.
 - a. Increase funding for the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative to \$5.04 million. Provide specific funding for a targeted approach to support formerly incarcerated people to start and join cooperatives.
 - b. Support small businesses by paying 30% of their employment taxes.
 - c. Help people with barriers to employment to attain business permits and licensing, including providing workshops and grants for associated fees.

What's Working

The [Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative](#),⁴⁰ established with support from City Council in 2014, offers innovative ways to address economic and social inequality in New York City. Worker cooperatives are businesses that are run and operated by the people who work in them (worker-owners). Worker cooperatives allow New Yorkers to build businesses together, therefore allowing all the workers to gain access to upward mobility and better working conditions. The initiative funds a network of more than a dozen organizations to help New Yorkers to start cooperatives, to grow and sustain existing cooperatives, to convert existing businesses to cooperatives, to access financing support, and to navigate their legal needs. This initiative, supported with \$10 million from the City Council over the last six years, has helped to triple the number of jobs in cooperatively owned businesses, many of them owned by women of color.

[GOSOWorks](#),⁴¹ is a program of Getting Out and Staying Out, and helps young men with a history or risk of justice-system involvement to connect to meaningful employment, while also assessing the individuals' capacities and strengths, and addressing their developmental needs and emotional well-being. GOSOWorks has established partnerships with a number of businesses and institutions, which benefit not only GOSOWorks participants, but also their families and their communities. They also can greatly benefit employer partners. Because GOSO prepares participants well for the workplace, provides them with continued support after they are employed, and encourages them to continue to pursue their education and training, they become outstanding employees, ready to grow with the challenges of the job. GOSOWorks' staffing solutions free, but our Internship-to-Employment (I2E) program can subsidize participants' employment for up to 240 hours. GOSOWorks currently partner with a range of employers including restaurants and bakeries, like Ovenly, Maman, Dos Toros, and The Ravioli Store; non-profits like CAMBA, Hour Children, and The Horticultural Society of New York; and businesses like Intersection, ERH Contracting, and ABC Worldwide Stone.



Education & Schools

Invest in education and schools as spaces for students, families, and the broader community to access education for success and for liberation, to connect to the resources they need, and as places where transformative and restorative justice is taught and practiced.

One of the most direct ways to reinvest in our communities is to reinvest in our schools and in education. Only in so doing may we restore to directly impacted neighborhoods and families the preparation, supports, and access needed to secure their futures. History has shown that both educational achievement and college completion are critical to ending cycles of oppression negatively impacting our communities. Rather than expecting marginalized students to successfully navigate a biased education system and cheering the few that miraculously do, we must make schools places where *all* youth learn in their varied ways *and* get the supports they need to thrive. In doing so, we have the opportunity to change the primary institution of socialization - our schools. Failure to reinvest in education and schools is a choice to continue to harm those directly impacted by criminalization, incarceration, and dehumanization.

Demands

1. Implement and resource transformative and restorative justice initiatives to replace punitive justice, with a focus on processes informed by students.
 - a. As called for by the Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC-NY), invest in the City's commitment to restorative justice by \$30 million directly to schools to build their own school climate initiatives, to hire people in roles such as peacebuilders, mental health and healing support staff, youth advocates, and restorative justice coordinators.⁴²
 - b. DSC-NY additionally demands a school-centered approach to restorative justice; a restorative justice accountability commission; a halt to the implementation of 300 new *Youth Coordination Officers*, and an elimination of the \$20 increase to school policing.
2. Enhance structural supports and connections to key services.
 - a. Increase the ratio of social workers to students to at least 1:250, while assessing ways to provide a higher ratio in schools with large high-needs populations such as students with disabilities, homeless students, or English Language Learners.⁴³
 - b. Increase staffing ratios for therapists, career advisors, mentors, resource liaisons, health services, and attorneys.
3. Revamp school curriculum.
 - a. Implement culturally responsive curriculum (culture and gender affirming, Rites of Passage), and recruit and train teachers who can relate to and address needs of students. This could be achieved with a \$60 million initial investment.⁴⁴
 - b. Expand and improve curriculum to support preparation for meaningful and living wage careers including trades education, access to technology and tech careers, and college preparation. The city should invest \$15 million to support existing Student Success Centers, to establish these centers in 40 new high school campuses and to implement year-round College Bridge programs.⁴⁵
 - c. Integrate more non-traditional education, including out-of-classroom learning experiences up through high school.
4. Draw on City resources (in addition to State reforms) to make equitable resources available to all NYC schools.
 - a. Provide essential school supplies for all students.
 - b. Renovate school buildings to be structures that are welcoming and nurturing.
 - c. Increase the number of teachers in classrooms and create smaller classroom sizes.
5. Support additional enrichment programming.
 - a. Allocate increased funding to support extended hours programming including access to libraries and librarians; arts programming; financial literacy; sports; and student-led programs in which youth support each other to avoid and manage risk and conflict.
6. Expand investments to provide free, public, quality higher education at CUNY

- b. Work with the state to allocate the \$812 million needed to make CUNY free for all students.⁴⁶
 - c. Work with the state to make ASAP (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs) and ACE (Accelerate Complete Engage) available to all CUNY students.⁴⁷
7. Make reparative investments for justice-impacted youth and families.
 - a. Ensure what is provided for students in schools is also provided for youth who are incarcerated or out-of-school.
 - b. Fund scholarships for children of incarcerated parents.
8. Create more opportunities for students and families to have a meaningful voice in their schools.

What's Working

Since 2014, [Middle School 50 in Williamsburg](#)⁴⁸ has been partnered with a community-based organization, El Puente, through the Community Schools program. One focus of their work has been establishing a school climate more oriented towards restorative justice, and less reliant on punishment. Partly supported by a grant from the Office of Community Schools, they've been able to add more counselors to their school team, including a group of peer counselors who are implementing restorative practices to create a safe school environment on their own terms. They've also held professional development sessions with all staff around implicit bias and culturally relevant teaching, trained all Community Schools staff to act as counselors, and worked school-wide to use counseling as a first step in response in conflict and challenging behaviors. In the process, they've reduced suspensions by more than 60%.

In 2015, NYC made an investment of \$23 million in new funding for [Arts Education in schools](#), which is now baselined in the City budget.⁴⁹ Funds were allocated to hire 120 new arts teachers at middle and high schools that are underserved, improve arts facilities across the City, and foster partnerships with some of the City's cultural institutions. The investment has increased access to arts education for thousands of students with new classes and activities in music, dance, visual arts and theater. Further funding could expand the program reach for a greater portion of NYC's 1.1 million public school students.



Community Programs & Services

Support and expand resources that all of NYC's diverse residents can access in their communities to relax, learn, thrive, and lead.

In order to best support individuals and their communities, investments must be made in accessible, wrap-around services that fulfill the needs and hopes of the specific community where those programs and services take place. Services should focus on the health and well-being of all community members inclusive of age, race, sexuality, gender, ability, education, employment status, immigration status, and other factors that are often used to exclude people, intentionally or unintentionally. To support the people in our City who have been most marginalized, not just to survive but also to thrive, we have to consider the type of investments that can improve quality of life, bring people together, and bring them joy. Investing in New Yorkers' ability to live their fullest lives and in the leadership of residents to build community together, we can support safety and stability in our neighborhoods.

Demands

1. Invest in community-led community centers, recreational parks, and community spaces with accessible facilities for the entire community, and especially those 18-26 years old.
 - a. Provide funding for community-driven research projects to assess local neighborhood needs and strengths and for the development of neighborhood specific community centers.
 - b. Utilize and re-develop vacant or underutilized buildings for community uses.
 - c. Help non-profits to buy their own buildings and support incubators sites for the development of new non-profits.
 - d. Expand hours, diversity and quantity of programming, and locations of Parks and Recreation Centers, including expanding service in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens to establish at least one center per 125,000 residents.⁵⁰
 - e. Expand and improve parks with facilities for young children, working public bathrooms, and upgraded sports facilities.
 - f. Add staffing for maintenance and operations of parks across the City as advocated by the [Play Fair Coalition](#).⁵¹
 - g. Create more spaces for mentoring and peer mentoring.
 - h. Support positive events to help people connect with their neighbors out in the community (block parties, street festivals, etc).
2. Make public transportation accessible to everyone.
 - a. Fully fund the [Fair Fares](#)⁵² reduced price Metrocard program, including single-ride and pay-as-you-go fares, and implement [fare capping](#).⁵³
 - b. Make all student metrocards unlimited, so that students can participate in after school activities beyond the current timeframe (8pm) and beyond one additional ride a day. Students who live near their schools should also get metrocards so they can participate in programming in other neighborhoods.
3. Support universal child care that works for working families.
 - a. Expand afternoon hours beyond the existing Universal Pre-K and 3-K programs.
 - b. Provide support for parents who seek training and parenting resources. These trainings should be available outside of the Agency for Child Services, in supportive, non-coercive settings such as Head Start, UPK/3-K programs, and WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) programs.
4. Invest in public libraries to expand educational and recreational services.
 - a. Continue and build upon the \$33 million in additional operating funding for New York City's public libraries that was included in the FY2020 budget. Further funding can more adequately fund six-day service and programs in NYC's three library systems, and increase capital funding for urgent facility maintenance.
 - b. Expand services like ESL classes, computer skills training, TASC (formerly GED) preparation, and career counseling.
 - c. Offer expanded free resources through libraries, like meeting space and printing.
 - d. Expand the diversity of library offerings, including programs and materials in multiple languages, increasingly representative of NYC communities.
 - e. Invest in learning centers focused on activism & social justice.

4. Establish creative spaces & cultural hubs in communities for all creative disciplines.
 - a. Increase funding to expand creative spaces & cultural hubs that are accessible to the entire community, and support and sustain community institutions that serve as creative spaces & cultural hubs, such as libraries, schools, museums, small businesses, and community organizations.
5. Invest in youth leadership training, Rites of Passage/identity development (inclusive of LGBTQ and gender non-conforming youth) and other non-traditional programs that support youth to have a voice in community institutions.
 - a. For these programs to be most effective, they cannot be subject to the requirements of the Department of Youth and Community Development's current COMPASS programs,⁵⁴ which allocate a maximum cost-per-participant that is insufficient for running quality programs.
6. Expand access to City agencies, legal services, and civic engagement in neighborhood based facilities.
7. Increasing funding allocations to several of the City Council's NYC Initiatives, including Digital Inclusion, Anti-Poverty Funding, Young Women's Initiative, and Anti-Violence Youth Programs.

What's Working

Inclusive Services at Brooklyn Public Library⁵⁵ (BPL) provides unique programs for children and teens with and without disabilities. Fostering an inclusive environment, the libraries open their doors to all children, parents, caregivers and educators. Dedicated equipment makes the library experience accessible to children with different abilities. Cube chairs, mats for floor play, positioning cushions, and adaptive toys, are available. Inclusive Services is located in five barrier-free libraries in Brooklyn, and with further funding, could be expanded to more of the BPL's 60 branches.

The Brotherhood/Sister Sol's Rites of Passage Program⁵⁶ (ROP) is designed to empower youth through discovery and discussion of history, culture, social justice and the political forces surrounding them. In partnership with secondary schools and within the community, The Brotherhood/Sister Sol (BroSis) develops chapters, each consisting of 10 to 18 youth members and two adult Chapter Leaders. The Chapter Leaders facilitate weekly sessions and serve as mentors, supporters, confidantes, counselors, teachers, and more. They build trusting relationships and offer guidance to the chapter members as they face the challenges of young adulthood.

During the intensive four- to six-year ROP process, members learn to think critically and act ethically through workshops, cultural excursions, community service opportunities, retreats, college trips, and in engaging in the multitude of other programming at BroSis. Each chapter develops a Mission Statement and collectively defines what it means to be a sister/brother, woman/man and leader. Members also create individual Oaths of Dedication—personal testimonies to how they will live their lives with which they create pathways through which to live their lives on their own terms. The BroSis curriculum for all programming is structured around twelve curriculum focus issues, incorporating topics such as Pan African and Latinx History, Dismantling Sexism and Misogyny, LGBTQ Justice, Environmental Justice, Political Education, Sexual Education & Responsibility, and Educational Achievement and more.

The impacts of this collective work are clear. In NYC the general high school graduation rate is 70%; while research has found that the graduation rate of Black and Latino boys is 34%. Over 40% of Black men between the ages of 18-65 in New York City are unemployed. 90% of BroSis alumni have graduated from high school, 95% either graduated from high school or earned their GED and 95% are working full time or enrolled in college. Harlem's teen-aged pregnancy rate is 15% – but BroSis members have a rate of less than 2%.



Conflict Transformation & Alternative Accountability

Support communities to manage conflict so that it does not escalate to harm, and when harm has happened, to intervene with models that focus on restoration rather than punishment.

We can and must do much more to prevent the kinds of conflict and harm that we *can* prevent through investments in all of the areas we have named above. We must also recognize that conflict and harm will still occur, and we must develop models for responding that do not rely on violence and punishment (which continue the cycle of trauma and harm), but rather on interventions that aim to address and make amends for the harm that was caused, involving all parties in creating a solution. While these interventions may be a more compassionate way to deal with people who have caused harm, the main reason to pursue them is because they work. We need to invest in all levels of alternative programs - diversion, alternatives to incarceration, violence interruption, mediation, and restorative justice. The existing system of punishment - with the deprivation it relies on, and the trauma it fosters - has not made us safer.

Demands

1. Invest in the capacity of communities to respond to conflict, prevent violence and harm, and to address and heal from it in sustainable ways.
 - a. Support or develop community mediation, trauma and healing centers in all of the neighborhoods most impacted by mass incarceration, with a particular attention to needs of youth, use of arts-based therapy, and engagement of peers in providing programming. Integrate within these centers restorative justice initiatives. To be truly safe community spaces, these centers must have no affiliation with the police.
 - b. Create paid opportunities for community members to learn and apply skills related to social-emotional support and civic engagement, such as conflict de-escalation techniques for themselves, their family and their neighbors.
 - c. Increase programming for trauma-informed healing work for those who have been violent or have been affected by violence.
 - d. Increase funding for the [Anti-Gun Violence Youth Employment Program](#)⁵⁷ and increase support for mentorship of young people.
2. Invest in the capacity of government agencies and workers to better respond to harm and violence, and promote healing.
 - a. Provide trainings for government workers and government funded programs in trauma-informed care.
 - b. Train employees throughout the ranks of government agencies in restorative justice philosophies and practices. This work requires a paradigm shift, so training is important at all levels of government.
3. Expand investment in diversion and alternatives to incarceration (ATI).⁵⁸
 - a. Sufficiently expand investment in diversion and ATI programs to create enough alternatives to replace all City sentences (sentences of less than 1 year).
 - b. Include programs for those with domestic violence charges, focused on addressing root causes of intimate partner violence.
 - c. Prioritize programs which use a trauma-informed approach and are proven to provide those involved not just with an alternative sentence, but with skills and resources to lead more stable lives.
3. Support alternative models of responding to community violence and fostering safety
 - a. Expand funding for violence interruption programming⁵⁹ to include civic engagement, mobilization, political education, and creation of youth public health workers. Each site should receive at least 1.5 million for services, not including the cost of space.
 - b. To be trusted and effective in their communities, these programs must have no affiliation with the police.

What's Working

[The Women's Prison Association's JusticeHome⁶⁰](#) is a trauma-informed, gender-responsive, community and home-based alternative to incarceration program for women of all experiences. It is designed for women who have been charged with a felony and are facing a minimum of six months' incarceration, and aims to support them so they can stay in their communities rather than serve time in jail or prison. The JusticeHome team works with participants to enhance stability and overall well-being by addressing specific needs that may have contributed to criminal justice involvement. JusticeHome strongly believes in honoring each participant's resilience, strengths, and voice. The program team works collaboratively with every participant to create an individualized change plan to help identify needs and achieve goals. The programs have led to increased stability for approximately 100 women and their families, and costs much less than incarceration, at \$10k-\$20K per participant per year. In the lifetime of the program, 90% of graduates have remained free of future involvement with the legal system. The program is currently in the process of expanding to also serve women with misdemeanor charges.

[Make It Happen⁶¹](#) (MIH) is a program of **Neighbors in Action**, and is part a program funded by the Office of Victims of Crime and run in partnership with the Center for Court Innovation's Domestic Violence department. Its mission is to give young men between the ages of 16 and 24 who have experienced violence, the tools necessary to overcome traumatic experiences, and enable them to succeed in spite of those experiences. Make It Happen is a trauma-informed and culturally competent program that provides mentorship, intensive case management, clinical interventions and supportive workshops. Participants are challenged to think about how their definition of manhood is intertwined in trauma and gender roles. Through group workshops and client-driven individual sessions, people are able to recognize and process their own trauma. Make It Happen also works to engage traditional victim service providers on the needs of male crime victims, with the goal of making victim services compensation available to young men of color who have been victims of crime. Since the program's inception in 2012, Make It Happen has served close to 400 young men in and around Brooklyn. Within the past two years, MIH has developed a peer mentor program called CHAMPS (Community Healers And Mentors for Personal Success). To date, Make It Happen has 16 CHAMPS that provide informal supportive services to middle school students. Participants have said that the program helps them to better understand and express their feelings.

[Release the Grip⁶²](#) a program of **Bronx Connect**, operates as part of New York City's Crisis Management System, in the 44th Precinct. Release the Grip has built its strength from those in the community who are already working for change. Community members employed as violence interrupters are credible messengers - people who have experienced violence, and incarceration - who then trained to intervene in conflict before gun violence happens. They create partnerships with informal community leaders, and provide young people in therapeutic services (including helping the community mourn those lost to gun violence and seek healing), employment readiness, and leadership training. As a result of their work, the 44th Precinct experienced a 52% drop in shootings from 2015 to 2017, with no homicides in their catchment area.



Structure of Investments

Restructure the methods by which funds are distributed in order to better support grassroots groups and avoid replicating systems of oppression.

Grassroots groups constitute the social fabric of local communities in NYC. They know best how to meet the needs of people who the City and larger organizations are often less effective in reaching, and they reflect the culture and ideals of the neighborhoods they work in and with. Yet the mechanisms of City investment have for decades put these groups at a disadvantage. Future investments must be made in a way that recognizes and supports the brilliance of these groups, reflects a belief in the knowledge and wisdom that communities and residents have about their own needs and solutions, and demonstrates commitment to meet people where they are at.

Demands

1. Establish a staffed and funded oversight committee or committee to decentralize funding decisions, improve inclusion in City services, address structural racism in City agencies, and improve accountability. The committee(s) would be tasked to
 - a. Oversee how justice reinvestment funds are spent.
 - b. Ensure that funds better reach grassroots organizations and community leaders, including through organizations led by and accountable to the people they exist to serve: Black and brown people, women, NYCHA residents, youth, elderly, non-native English speakers, the differently-abled, mental health recipients, people who use drugs, and LGBTQ people.
 - c. Advise the City on the structure of Request for Proposals to remove potential barriers for grassroots organizations.
 - d. Support small organizations to build capacity.
 - e. Assess the City's administrative costs taken from State funds to identify opportunities to direct more resources to the groups delivering programming.
 - f. Institute real enforceable consequences to deter City agencies from late payment of contracts that strain small organizations and harm communities.
 - g. Develop a plan for all executive and leadership-level staff at City agencies and publicly funded social service agencies to participate in anti-racism and racial justice training.
 - h. Recommend ways to make City agencies more flexible in the way they provide services, for example, offering video appointments.
 - i. The mandate of the [commission to make recommendations on reinvestments](#) in communities impacted by Rikers Island⁶³ should be interpreted to include all of the above considerations.
2. Improve flexibility and effectiveness of funding.
 - a. Funding structures should support quality not quantity. Cost per participant models must be completely revamped to account for the full cost of providing quality services, and with consideration for what types or program structures best serve communities and the specific people & groups organizations serve.
 - b. Eliminate the delays in payment for City contracts faced by many non-profits that serve the most marginalized New Yorkers, and institute real enforceable consequences to deter City agencies from late payment of contracts that strain small organizations and harm communities. Assign a specific timeframe to each City agency with a role in contract oversight for their contract review work, and create a public-facing tracking system to allow vendors to monitor the progress of their contract through each stage of the contract process.⁶⁴
 - c. Provide sufficient funding and technical assistance to help grantees implement language justice principles and effectively serve undocumented people.
 - d. Establish mechanisms for groups without 501c3 status to apply for and receive funds.
3. Prioritize directing funds and services to the people and communities that have been most criminalized, most marginalized and most divested from, under their leadership and direction.

4. Make [reparations](#)⁶⁵ to entire impacted communities, in addition to individuals. Work to document and address the legacy of Rikers Island,, such as the [Rikers Public Memory Project](#),⁶⁶ should also be encouraged and supported.

What's Working

[Participatory Budgeting](#)⁶⁷ is a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. It's based on the idea that the people who live in a community best know its needs. Through Participatory Budgeting in NYC (PBNYC), community members directly decide how to spend at least \$1,000,000 of the public budget in participating Council Districts (currently, 32 districts). Community members can propose and vote on projects like improvements to schools, parks, libraries, public housing, and other public or community spaces. After ideas are submitted, community volunteers, called Budget Delegates, work to turn ideas into real proposals for a ballot, with input from city agencies. Through a public vote, residents then decide which proposals to fund. People can vote for projects if they live in the district and are at least 11 years old or are in 6th Grade (immigration status is not considered). There's a PBNYC Citywide Committee — made up of individuals, community organizations, and Council Members — which helps guide the process and supports PB across the city. The Committee proposes rules for the process each year, which are formalized into a Rule Book adopted by the City Council. For the time being, PBNYC only deals with capital money, and a fairly limited portion of the total City budget.

The [Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition](#)⁶⁸ (CCJRC) has made major strides in securing investments for the communities that have been most criminalized, and also charting a new path for *how* those investments will be made to best support those communities and their own leaders and institutions. In 2013, the tragic murder of Tom Clements, the executive director of the Colorado Department of Corrections, represented a crucial turning point. Executive Director Clements had come to Colorado from Missouri to implement a reform agenda in corrections policy. Colorado leadership and legislators initially contemplated reactive and punitive measures to reduce the likelihood of a similar tragedy, but CCJRC and several community reentry organizations saw an opportunity to continue the reform work started by Executive Director Clements. CCJRC worked to highlight the importance and impact of community-led public safety strategies and to ensure budget priorities aligned. Since 2014, CCJRC has passed three bills that will invest over \$50m in communities for new community-led, community-centric safety strategies. Furthermore, each grant program is being run by an intermediary – not a government agency. The Latino Coalition for Community Leadership, two community foundations, and two Community Development Financial Institutions are managing the various grant programs created through these investments. Through this model, Colorado's justice reinvestment strategy has prioritized using existing infrastructure in the communities and driving the money much deeper into community ownership.

Endnotes

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8. In Brooklyn, a diversion center should be located in East New York or Brownsville, to serve the 75th and 73rd precincts (with the 1st and 7th highest numbers of EDP calls in 2018). In Queens, a diversion center should be located in Southeast Queens, to serve the 105th and 103rd precincts (with the 12th and 16th highest numbers of EDP calls in 2018). In the Bronx, an additional diversion center should be developed in the South Bronx, to serve the 44th, 40th, 42nd, and 43rd precincts (with the 2nd, 3rd, 8th, and 14th highest numbers of EDP calls in 2018). In Manhattan, an additional diversion center should be developed between Midtown and Lower Manhattan, to serve the 14th and 13th precincts (with the 5th and 11th highest numbers of EDP calls in 2018)
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NYBG Testimony on behalf of New York City Parks and Recreation

March 13, 2020 - 10AM

City Hall

Good morning Chairman Koo and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. My name is Angel Hernandez and I am Director of Government Relations for the New York Botanical Garden (NYBG.) The Garden is a member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) – a coalition of 34 cultural, arts, and science organizations who have built a public-private partnership with the City of New York, are located in all five boroughs, and collectively welcome visits from millions of NYC public school children and tourists on an annual basis.

I sit before you this morning to testify on behalf of our ongoing relationship with one of our major partners in the Bronx community, and perhaps partner to many cultural institutions throughout the city – the Department of Parks and Recreation. For almost 130 years the New York Botanical Garden and the NYC Parks Department have enjoyed a historic relationship, for the Garden occupies a major portion of Bronx Park. According to a historic source “With almost 720 acres in the heart of the borough, Bronx Park provided a rich cultural and educational park experience.” In 1891, the city allotted 250 acres to the New York Botanical Society, which fashioned the Garden after the Royal Botanical Gardens in Kew, England. Since then, it has remained to be one of the most distinguished gardens in the world, housing living collections of temperate and tropical plants from all over the world, as well as a huge collection of preserved plant specimens. Then in 1898, the city allotted another 250 acres to the New York Zoological Society to build a preserve for native animals and promote zoology. The Wildlife Conservation Park, better known as the Bronx Zoo, and fellow CIG, opened in 1899 and remains one of the largest wildlife conservation parks in the United States, housing 4,000 animals representing more than 650 species. Other CIG members such as The Bronx County Historical Society administers the historic landmark Edgar Allan Poe Cottage at Poe Park, both NYC Parks Department properties, while our outer borough CIG neighbor Queens Museum can be found inside Flushing Meadows–Corona Park. It is quite evident how NYC Parks remain to be home to some of our city’s highly venerated cultural institutions.

Chairman Koo, members of the Committee, I want to stress the importance of the Garden’s ongoing relationship with the Department of Parks and Recreation and our collective efforts to support workforce development among the city’s hardworking cultural workers. Through the *Parks Opportunity Program*, for example, the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Garden sponsored educational programming that covered a variety of subject areas, including Introduction to Plant Science, Horticulture Techniques, Perennial Plant Management, and Grounds Management. Participants built skills both inside and

NYBG

outside of the classroom, through 18 modules spanning three months and 108 total credit hours. The Garden had developed a curriculum with the understanding of botany, maintenance of trees, turf, best pruning practices, and prepare participants for living wage careers in the plant care and horticultural fields. Graduating participants were equipped with a working knowledge of how to best promote healthy tree life, a skill needed to maintain the City's investment major initiatives, like *Million Trees NYC*.

Yet, these partnerships to expand Workforce Development work at each of our institutions cannot continue without additional funding. Therefore, the New York Botanical Garden and the rest of the CIG are asking for an additional \$20M in FY21 Cultural funding - \$10M of which would go to the CIG, \$10M of which would go to the program groups. Since the City may be facing a budget shortfall from the State, we ask that the City ensures at a minimum that we are not affected, including all baselined and non-baselined funding from FY20, if these budget constraints makes additional funding infeasible for FY21. For all FY20 funding to be restored, we ask that the \$25.4M added last year in addition to the baselined budget be included again this year.

Thank you Chairman Koo and the Members of the Committee, for giving me the opportunity to speak and for your support of NYC Parks and the Cultural Community.

I am, of course, happy to address any questions the committee may have.

Respectfully submitted by:

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NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

March 13, 2020

Hearing on the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation Budget

Testimony of
Carter H. Strickland, Jr.
New York State Director
The Trust for Public Land

Thank you Chairperson Koo and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify on the FY21 budget for the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and the priorities reflected in that budget.

My name is Carter Strickland and I am the New York State Director of The Trust for Public Land, a national non-profit organization that creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. One of The Trust for Public Land's guiding principles – supported by numerous studies – is that parks and open space are critical infrastructure that make cities and their residents healthier, happier, more prosperous, cleaner, greener, and more resilient. Since 1978, The Trust for Public Land has worked with New York City residents to improve their neighborhoods by creating public spaces where they can safely play, connect with nature and each other, and create resilient communities.

I am testifying today to voice my support for the Play Fair campaign and increasing the Parks Department operational budget by \$200 million, with \$100 million invested in the expense budget for NYC Parks, and \$100 million for capital investments for NYC parks.

Every year The Trust for Public Land ranks the park systems of the 100 largest cities in America. In 2017, New York ranked number 7. We came up behind cities like Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Arlington on median park size and spending per resident. In 2018 and 2019, New York was knocked down to number 9 in the Parkscore rankings, as Cincinnati and Chicago moved ahead of us. New York is renowned for innovation and world class amenities but our parks system is falling behind.

The biggest difference between New York City and the cities that rank above us in ParkScore is the number of parks in the city system. New York has significantly more parks, and therefore a much bigger task at hand when it comes to maintaining them. In fact, both Washington, DC and San Francisco are comparable to NYC when looking at median park size and park land as a percentage of city area, but those cities have fewer parks. Therefore, New York City has a greater need for gardening and operational staff because we have more parks to maintain. If we are going to ensure quality parks for all New Yorkers, we must make sure we have the resources to adequately maintain the more than 1,700 parks within the New York City park system.

New Yorkers love their parks more than any other infrastructure system in the city, yet parks receive less than one percent (1%) of the total city budget. The low budget allocation for parks does not reflect the value they provide for the City and its residents. Parks enhance property values and boost economic development, support local jobs, increase spending at local businesses, and generate local tax revenue. Parks create opportunities for organized events such as art fairs, athletic events, food festivals, and concerts and positive economic impacts to their communities. Parks keep us resilient in the face of climate change, as they can reduce the temperature of urban

heat islands by as much as seven to twelve percent (7-12%) and can absorb stormwater. Parks keep us active and address the social determinants of health that drive most non-communicable diseases that cost so much in medical bills, lost time, and lost wages. Parks also maintain mental and social health, strengthening social and community links. All of these services are incredibly valuable alone and in combination.

New Yorkers are lucky because 99% do, in fact, have a park within a ten-minute walk from their home. However, we need to focus on the quality of those parks. Our parks are old (on average 73 years old) and many have not seen upgrades in over 20 years. Increased funding for the Parks Department could be used to staff, maintain, and secure our parks to ensure that we all have access to high quality parks.

The Play Fair campaign is addressing these concerns with its FY21 budget platform. The plan requests money for maintenance and operations, recreation and programming, investment in park safety, nature and resiliency, and capital investments including enough money to rebuild 10 neighborhood parks with the Community Parks Initiative. These types of investments would demonstrate to New Yorkers that The City understands the role that parks play in our lives, and that everyone deserves a quality park.

Another way to improve our parks is for the Department of Parks and Recreation to develop cost-effective public-private partnerships for capital projects, similar to its well-established practice of relying on conservancies in big parks and “friends of” groups in smaller parks to fund or even undertake maintenance and operations (and in the biggest parks, on capital projects as well). My organization, The Trust for Public Land, has worked with the city for over 20 years to create publicly accessible

playgrounds on school property that also serve as green infrastructure to absorb stormwater and combat the urban heat island effect. We have built 210 to date, at present costs of approximately \$1 million per acre, with much of that cost provided by private philanthropy, and our streamlined methods take 12 to 18 months from start of participatory design to construction completion. We have also overseen the construction of larger parks, such as Heritage Park on Staten Island using Port Authority funds and South Point Park on Roosevelt Island using funds from the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation. As the Department of Parks and Recreations starts to implement its new design-build authority and otherwise seeks to more efficiently deliver capital projects, The Trust for Public Land would welcome the opportunity to partner with the City to design and build projects on NYC parkland.

New York's park system is good but not good enough. We need to increase funding and explore opportunities for new parks. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.