

CITIZEN ACTION OF NEW YORK LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY AGENDA 2025



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Note: Some bills in this legislative and policy agenda do not have bill numbers because they were not introduced in the Assembly, the Senate or both as of the time this agenda went to print. We will produce an updated agenda or a supplement to this edition as new information becomes available. Other proposals do not have bill numbers because they seek funding or propose legislative language to be included in the final state budget, due on April 1, 2025, or make recommendations for state agency actions, like changes to regulations or agency policies. Please feel free to contact us for information on any proposal in this agenda.

Introduction: A Call for State Action in a Time of National Crisis

This 2025 Legislative and Policy Agenda from Citizen Action of New York, a multi-issue membership organization with chapters and affiliates throughout the state, is a call for urgent action – this year – by our governor and state legislature.

Just a few examples illustrate the challenges so many New York families face. Homelessness is increasing dramatically in our state. Childcare is not widely available in many communities and is too often unaffordable. Despite the federal Affordable Care Act and state reforms, health care costs are still out of reach for all too many families. The climate crisis is getting ever more acute, as we face warmer and warmer summers and more severe weather each year. Each of these problems requires bold solutions – by government. Our menu for these solutions for a wide range of concerns of average New Yorkers – including housing, climate, mass incarceration, education, childcare, and democracy – is below.

But we must highlight the common thread for all these issues: the need for billions of dollars in additional state revenue and to address the threats to democracy in our nation due to a national crisis impacting the states. President Trump and the new Republican congressional majorities in both houses of Congress, along with mega-billionaire quasi-President Elon Musk are at this very moment taking a sledgehammer to our federal agencies and the vital funding they provide to every state including New York. Roughly four in ten of every dollars in our state budget – around \$95 billion – comes from our federal government. They are turning a blind eye to the consequences of their actions on average Americans and on average New Yorkers. The cuts they propose, some of which they will inevitably succeed in making, will have an impact on every single policy area highlighted in this Agenda.

New York elected officials of course must speak out against the current national threats to our democracy and give voice to the impacts on average New Yorkers of the proposed federal cuts to services their constituents rely on, from local hospitals, to SNAP (food stamps) to housing to education. **But speaking out is not enough. Just as fundamentally, we must increase state funding this year for vital state programs to make up for some of the harms that will happen as Trump and his allies take aim at the social safety net while cutting taxes for the rich and biggest corporations. That requires billions in additional state revenue.**

Some of our ideas for new sources of state revenue – aimed at asking those who have benefited the most from the tax and other economic policies of the past few decades – are discussed in the *Public Money* section below.

Last but not least, the attacks on all New Yorkers by the national government that have just begun can be ameliorated – at least in part – by bold state policy solutions. Some of the most important ways the governor and legislature can protect New Yorkers and improve their lives are discussed below. We call upon our governor and our state legislators to be equal to the unprecedented challenges before us in 2025.

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Note: Bill numbers in this Agenda are for the 2025 legislative session, unless a star appears (example: A1281*), which means that the bill had not been reintroduced from the 2024 session as of the time of publication and we therefore have instead provided the 2024 bill number. Some squibs in this Agenda do not have a bill number at all: they describe pending bills that we expect to be introduced in 2025, budget proposals, or proposals for state agency action.

PUBLIC MONEY

In 2021, Citizen Action and its partners in the Invest in Our New York (IONY) Campaign won over \$10 billion in new progressive revenue by modestly raising taxes on the wealthy, including increased income taxes for New Yorkers earning more than \$1 million, new tax brackets for those making more than \$5 million, and an increase in corporate tax rates. Despite these important victories, the new tax levels will only provide a portion of the funding we need to address critical concerns, including the significant potential federal funding cuts to key public programs and services such as public education and childcare, housing, the climate crisis, and public benefits such as SNAP and TANF. We will continue to fight in 2025 for new progressive revenue measures to adequately fund these priorities, and to push for new economic development policies that create opportunities for communities rather than providing handouts to wealthy corporations.

Generating Additional Public Money: In order to generate the public money for the critical programs the state needs, Governor Hochul and the legislature should include the following five proposals in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-26 state budget:

- **Raising Corporate Taxes on the Most Profitable Corporations:** Each year, corporations fail to pay their fair share of taxes, despite their record-breaking profits. Corporations pay less in taxes now than they did in the 1990s. Citizen Action therefore supports legislation to ensure that companies that do business in our state with over \$2.5 million in profits pay what they owe in taxes. This proposal would raise \$7 billion a year (S953/A1971).
- **Progressive Personal Income Tax Reforms:** Citizen Action supports a restructuring of the personal income tax (PIT) to create additional tax brackets to make the tax code more progressive and to raise additional revenue from the top 5% of earners in the state. Average New Yorkers pay taxes on our hard-earned income to fund our communities and the services we all rely on. But because of how our tax code is structured, millionaires and billionaires don't pay their fair share. For example, right now, someone who makes \$215,000 a year pays the same tax rate as someone who makes \$1 million, and a New Yorker making \$5 million a year will pay the percentage of his or her income as someone who makes \$25 million. This proposal would raise over \$21 billion a year (S1622/A1281).

- **Expansion of Capital Gains Tax for High-Income New Yorkers:** To address the favoritism in the federal tax code given to wealthy New Yorkers, this bill would impose higher state taxes on items like long-term capital gains and dividends earned by wealthy New Yorkers, raising \$12 billion a year (S1439/A676).
- **Taxing the Wealth of Billionaires:** This proposal would establish an annual tax on the increase in value of stocks and other investments, closing a major loophole that enables the wealthiest New Yorkers to shield taxes on the greatest source of their wealth: the rising value of their investment portfolios. In addition to raising significant revenue, this proposal would address a significant inequity in our state's tax code: New York does not tax the value of investments, but we impose property and school taxes on the major and, in many cases, the only source of wealth of low- and moderate-income New Yorkers: the houses, co-ops, or condos we live in. This bill would raise \$33 billion in the first year and \$1.7 billion a year thereafter (S165/A3632).
- **Creation of an "Heirs Tax":** This proposal would replace New York's existing inheritance tax system with an "heirs' tax" that would tax inheritances as income to the recipient. Today, when someone dies, the heirs to their estate pay very little in taxes; this is even more true for very wealthy New Yorkers. For example, a New Yorker can inherit \$5 million and not pay a single dollar in taxes. The bill we support will overhaul the current inheritance tax system and allow the state to tax inheritances over \$250,000 (raises \$4 billion a year) (S914/A2049).

CLIMATE JUSTICE

Everyone deserves to live in a safe and healthy community protected from extreme weather and pollution. Serious weather events worldwide and closer to home, including, in New York, the massive 2023 Buffalo storm, Hurricane Ida in 2021 and Superstorm Sandy and Hurricane Irene, highlight that climate change is a global emergency, requiring immediate action by government, corporations, and individuals. Further, the ongoing health impacts of climate pollution in low-income communities and communities of color across the state that have been targeted by environmental racism is evidence enough that the state must move on a just transition agenda as it acts on climate. At the same time, residents must be protected from the burdens of any increased energy costs in the short and medium term due to our state's necessary transition to renewables. Contrary to the lies and distortions of the fossil fuel industry and their allies in government, a transition to a renewable energy economy will ultimately save money for consumers, businesses and taxpayers. We must also ensure that the jobs created in the new renewable energy economy are quality jobs, with good pay and benefits and worker protections. The opposition to climate action by President Trump and the new Republican majorities in both houses of Congress means that climate action by our state – both legislative action and funding – is even more urgent than before.

Implementation of the Landmark State Climate Law, Including Strong “Cap-and-Invest”

Regulations: The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (the CLCPA, also called the Climate Act), passed in 2019, mandates a 40% economy-wide reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030 and 85% by 2050, and also contains important provisions to help low-income communities and communities of color transition to a renewable energy economy on just terms. Under the CLCPA, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) was required to issue binding regulations by January 1, 2024 to make these all-important CLCPA GHG emissions targets legally enforceable and effective.

- **Immediate Release of the Cap-and-Invest Regulations:** The administration chose a “cap-and-invest” system as the primary means to meet the Climate Act’s GHG emissions reduction goals discussed above. In addition, a “cap-and-invest” system will raise billions of dollars annually from corporate polluters to fund initiatives to prevent future climate harms. In January of 2025 – without providing a reason – the administration announced an indefinite delay in the release of its proposed regulations. The failure to release any proposed regulations to meet the CLCPA emissions targets is a clear violation of the

CLCPA and a major setback for addressing the climate crisis in our state and raising revenue to address it. Along with dozens of climate organizations throughout New York State, we demand that the governor immediately release proposed GHG emissions regulations so that the public and the regulated community can comment, and so that the cap-and-invest program can go into effect as soon as possible.

- **Strong Cap-and-Invest Regulations and Legislation:** Citizen Action also calls for the proposed cap-and-invest regulations, once released, to include comprehensive reporting, year-by-year GHG reductions, strong enforcement measures and a prohibition on allowance trading. We also strongly support legislation sponsored by Assemblymember Kelles and Senator Parker to mandate these standards in statute (S9228*/A3975).

Generating Funding for the Transition to a Renewable Energy Economy: State entities like the New York State Energy and Research Authority (NYSERDA) and the Climate Action Council (created under the CLCPA), climate organizations and independent experts all agree that New York will need to spend billions annually to transition to a renewable energy economy. While a transition to renewables will ultimately save money for consumers and businesses, steps like improving energy efficiency, installing heat pumps in homes and businesses and switching to electric vehicles will entail upfront costs that will be difficult to afford for many New York homes and businesses. Given that the Trump administration and the new majorities in both houses of Congress have both called for a weakening of the federal Inflation Reduction Act, it is up to state and local governments to help fund the transition to renewables in our state. These steps will not just benefit the climate: they will address other basic needs, like quality housing and the improvement of health outcomes. The Climate Change Superfund Act, passed at the end of 2024, was a positive step. However, Superfund pays for damages brought on by severe weather and funds preventative steps to mitigate future harms, but it will not address the *causes* of climate change or fund the necessary transition to renewables. Citizen Action calls for a broad discussion between the governor and legislative leaders, with significant public input, to develop a mix of funding sources that provides the billions of dollars in annual funding we need. Here are two existing revenue ideas in addition to cap-and-invest that we support:

- **Invest in Our New York Bill Package:** This legislative package, developed by the IONY Campaign, will raise billions of dollars for climate justice and other vital state needs, like housing and health care, based on the principle of making large corporations and the wealthiest New Yorkers pay their fair share of taxes. (*See the “Public Money” section above for details on the IONY package.*)
- **Stop Climate Polluters Handouts Act:** This bill would eliminate hundreds of millions in annual tax breaks provided by the state to the fossil fuel industry, and limit the ability of fossil fuel companies to participate in several state economic development programs (S3606/A3675).

Programs We Need to Transition to a Renewable Energy Economy: Citizen Action supports several programs aimed at providing funding to homes, businesses, and communities to transition to renewables:

- **A Minimum of \$1 Billion in New Climate Spending:** In her FY 2025-26 Executive Budget, the governor included a vague proposal for \$1 billion in new climate spending – with the important catch that it is capital spending spread over a five-year period. In addition, the spending will be subject to the approval of the Director of the Budget, limiting the role of the legislature and the public in the process. Citizen Action, along with the NY Renews coalition, supports an absolute minimum of \$1 billion in new climate spending – this budget year – that is not restricted to capital spending. (We believe that far more should be provided given the need.) Further, the monies should be deposited in the Climate Action Fund (CAF), a fund which was created to ensure that climate spending will be subject to appropriate protections, like strong labor standards.
- **Affordable Climate-Ready Homes Act Program (ACRHA):** This program, outlined in upcoming legislation, would fund homes and businesses seeking to upgrade or replace existing homes and appliances to move off fossil fuels and to make them more energy efficient. ACRHA will also allow New York to cut pollution, make homes safer and healthier, save energy, reduce utility bills, and create numerous well-paying and quality jobs. Under this program, funding for programs located in “disadvantaged communities” (i.e., communities with large numbers of people of color and/or low-income people) and which benefit low- and moderate-income households would be given priority.
- **Green Affordable Pre-Electrification Program (GAP):** Programs like ACRHA aimed at moving off fossil fuels often are unable to assist many homeowners or owners of multifamily buildings to “go green” through steps like the installation of heat pumps and electric appliances because the buildings need certain types of rehabilitation work first. We therefore support legislation to establish a green affordable pre-electrification program (GAP) to fund and provide technical assistance for homes and buildings in need of a wide range of currently unfunded retrofits that are necessary for healthy buildings and achievement of New York’s climate mandates. “Pre-electrification” steps like removing mold, lead, pests, and other hazards can also have life-changing positive impacts for residents, especially children, older adults, and others vulnerable to respiratory issues (S3315/A2101).
- **Community-Directed Grants Program:** We support the establishment of a program to design and implement community-led pollution reduction projects that meet the needs of frontline and low-income communities, addressing climate change and other critical local problems like air quality in tandem.

Other Climate Measures We Support: We strongly support several additional measures to enhance the CLCPA, to apply the law to particular situations or industries, and to improve the accountability of utilities which provide energy to New Yorkers.

- **NY Home Energy Affordable Transition Act (NY HEAT):** This bill would require the Public Service Commission (PSC) to initiate proceedings to develop statewide plans to reduce the provision of gas service by utilities, thus better aligning the PSC's regulation of utility services with the CLCPA's GHG emissions targets and climate justice provisions. The revised 2025 version of the bill has new strong provisions to ensure adequate protections to gas customers as their communities are transitioned off gas. The bill also has an important affordability provision that limits energy bills for residential customers to 6% of their annual incomes (S4158/A4870).
- **Renewable Capitol Act:** This bill mandates that several state buildings in downtown Albany, including the Empire State Plaza and the State Capitol building, receive their electric power, and heating and cooling, from 100% renewable energy within three years, after a planning process with local community input. This bill arose from a successful campaign by the Sheridan Hollow Alliance for Renewable Energy (SHARE), a Capital District-based advocacy group that includes Citizen Action, that stopped the state from adding to an existing site in Sheridan Hollow two gas fired turbines to heat and cool state buildings; Sheridan Hollow is an environmental justice neighborhood near the State Capitol. This bill will protect local residents from decades of threats to their health due to fossil fuel combustion and other pollution generated by this state facility, while setting an example for New York businesses and others as to how to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions in buildings (S4842/A3466).
- **Utility Intervenor Funding:** A bill that has repeatedly passed the legislature and has been vetoed by the governor would permit intervenors representing residential or small business utility customers to apply for reimbursement for their participation in rate proceedings and other formal proceedings before PSC. The bill would allow nonprofits to retain trained advocates and experts, lessening the current imbalance between utilities and public interest advocates in vital PSC proceedings that address not only utility rates but critical climate policies like the building of fossil fuel facilities. Citizen Action will join its partners in 2025 in urging the legislature to once again pass this critical bill, and the governor to sign it (S2477/A836).
- **Packaging Reduction Act:** Citizen Action supports this bill, which would require companies to reduce their product packaging by 50% in 12 years, including petroleum-based plastics, and bans seventeen priority toxic chemicals in packaging materials. According to the Scoping Plan issued by the Climate Action Council, the state body

established to comply to the CLCPA, the waste sector, including plastics, accounts for 12% of the state's GHG emissions. Enactment of this bill would therefore be an important step in our state's efforts to address the climate crisis (S1464/A1749).

Anti-Climate Measures We Oppose: Citizen Action will also oppose half measures that claim to address the climate crisis, but in fact undermine the mandates or administration of the CLCPA. Two examples of bills in this category are: 1) the so-called "clean" fuel standard bill (S1343/A472), which aims to reduce the carbon intensity 20% in the on-road transportation sector by 2031, ignoring the stronger standards in the CLCPA, and 2) a bill to weaken the state's greenhouse gas emissions accounting system to allow for increased methane emissions and that exempts biofuel emissions from the Climate Act's GHG emissions limits (S2471/A6039*).

Nuclear Power is Not a Climate Solution: Citizen Action is joining with concerned advocates throughout New York State to oppose efforts by the Hochul administration to move towards the expansion of nuclear power in our state. Contrary to the suggestions of some, nuclear power is not a viable approach to complying with the GHG emissions targets in the CLCPA. The environmental harms (including nuclear waste storage) and environmental injustices (including the impacts on indigenous communities), safety concerns, and cost concerns that have hindered the expansion of the nuclear industry since the 1979 Three Mile Island accident have not been addressed over four decades later. Given the tens of billions of dollars in ratepayer and taxpayer subsidies that will be necessary to enable nuclear to play a meaningful role in meeting the CLCPA goals and the years it will take to bring new nuclear plants online, it would be far more prudent for New York to make investments in steps like expanding renewable energy capacity (like solar and wind), battery storage, and energy efficiency. At present, there is no justification for moving forward with the Master Plan on Advanced Nuclear Technologies proposed in the Executive Budget.

DEMOCRACY

We must strengthen and expand our democracy, particularly by protecting the right of every person to participate in the electoral process. Our fight to do so is made all the more urgent by the current political moment that has exacerbated long standing flaws in our democratic system, preventing individuals from exercising their right to voice their opinions and building a truly representative government. Voting is one way we receive the services we are entitled to, from affordable health care and housing, to quality schools. Citizen Action believes that an inclusive democracy is the only means by which we will be able to solve our most urgent problems and is therefore committed to challenging systemic barriers to voter participation. We believe that our government will never be adequately responsive to voters, especially low-income voters and communities of color, as long as our election campaigns are strongly shaped or outright controlled by wealthy donors and corporate interests.

Money In Politics: Since the Supreme Court's 2010 *Citizens United* decision dismantled key limits on political spending, wealthy donors and large corporations have increasingly dominated political campaigns, leading to disproportionate influence over elected officials. This influx of big money results in candidates prioritizing the interests of their financial backers over ordinary citizens, creating an uneven playing field that exacerbates inequality by favoring the wealthy and corporations. Citizen Action is committed to advancing policies that promote equal access to democracy for all.

- **Protect and Strengthen New York's Public Campaign Finance Program (PCFP):** Public financing of elections, in which small-dollar donations to campaigns are matched and multiplied by public funds, completed its first cycle on November 5, 2024. Of the 465 state legislative candidates in the 2022-2024 election cycle, 70.5% participated in the PCFP. Of the state legislative candidates who were on the 2024 general election ballot, 63% received public matching funds. The PCFB disbursed \$35 million during the 2022-2024 election cycle. The current 2025-2026 election cycle will see an expansion of the program, as it will include candidates running for statewide offices such as Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, and Comptroller. To meet the needs of the program, the governor and the legislature will need to satisfy the PCFB's request for \$114.5 million in the FY 2025-2026 budget, including \$100 million for matching funds for participating campaigns and \$14.5 million for program administration. In addition, we continue to call on the governor and the legislature to establish a methodology to ensure a steady source of funding and the predictability and stability of the public finance system in future years.

- **Democracy Preservation Act:** Federal law prohibits foreign nationals from making political contributions to our elections. However, since the *Citizens United* decision, the participation by business entities in our democracy has increased. We therefore support the Democracy Preservation Act, which would prohibit corporations with significant ownership interests by foreign owners from spending in New York elections (S324/A1258).

Expand Voting Rights and Access: Citizen Action is partnering with Fair Elections for New York, Let New York Vote, the NY BIPOC Democracy Table, and other coalitions to continue expanding voting rights and access in our state. Given the ongoing threats to our liberties and freedoms, we must be vigilant in the coming years. Citizen Action recommends the following legislative actions in 2025:

- **Automatic Voter Registration:** Sufficient funding should be provided in the FY 2025-26 budget to enhance the existing state online voter registration platform to enable participating agencies to effectively implement automatic voter registration this year. This funding will provide for Enhanced (backend) Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) and preregistration for eligible New Yorkers applying for certain Department of Motor Vehicles documents and for Medicaid enrollees, and allow New Yorkers to opt out.
- **Democracy During Detention Act:** Most citizens detained in jails have not lost their legal right to vote, yet in practice, their access to the ballot is severely limited, if not obstructed entirely. The current system is inconsistently applied across the state, and falls to local sheriffs, corrections staff, and civic groups, none of whom are tasked by state law to administer voting. Low-income voters and citizens of color are disproportionately detained in jails. Black and Latinx people are five times more likely than whites to be detained in New York State jails, and one in four people spend over 30 days in jail because of their inability to pay bail. We therefore support the Democracy During Detention Act, which codifies the right to vote for citizens detained in correctional facilities and creates a standard process across the state to make voting accessible for all those eligible to vote who are detained in jails (S440/A2121).
- **End Felony Disenfranchisement:** Felony disenfranchisement laws are rooted in the racist and ugly past of the Jim Crow era; the intent was to subjugate African-Americans and deny them the right to self-determination. Continuing this racist tradition weakens our democracy. Therefore, we call on the legislature to take the first step to pass a state constitutional amendment that entitles incarcerated people to vote in correctional facilities (S160/A412*).

ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND WORKERS RIGHTS

Everyone should have adequate wages and wage protections that allow workers to take care of themselves and their families. Citizen Action is demanding governmental action to ensure that we begin to move away from the exploitative working conditions that leave our communities overworked and underpaid.

Temporary Disability Insurance Reform: Citizen Action supports this bill, which would make vital reforms to New York’s Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) program. This bill, which has garnered backing from both labor unions and small businesses alike, addresses the inability of working-class New Yorkers to take leave from work for unexpected personal health crises without facing significant hardship. TDI benefits have remained unchanged at \$170 a week since they were set in 1989. This bill addresses this inequity by removing this \$170 weekly cap. New York lags behind more than 10 other states in capped weekly benefits. The bill also shifts the funding model from a 100% employee contribution to a more balanced 40% employee contribution, easing the financial burden on workers and helping small businesses offer a higher level of paid leave than they can currently afford (S172/A84).

Enforcement of Worker Protections: We support the Empire Worker Protection Act, which would allow workers and their representatives to bring enforcement actions in the name of the State against employers that violate wage, hour, and other labor laws, despite “forced arbitration” clauses used by many well-known companies requiring all disputes to be resolved by an arbitrator rather than through court action. The right of workers to have meaningful access to the courts is critical, as the state does not have the resources to help most workers victimized by illegal practices. In addition to relief for workers, Empire Act lawsuits will generate millions in penalties for the education and enforcement activities of the state Department of Labor (S448/A4278).

ENDING MASS INCARCERATION

Citizen Action believes that every person has inherent dignity and that all people, including those who cause harm, are worthy of healing and love. Our current criminal legal system should be grounded in the concepts of safety, fairness, and redemption for everyone. Instead, some fearmongering elected officials and their big-money backers are keeping our communities trapped in a carceral complex that perpetuates harm. The current system takes money from poor communities, separates families, and affects people's economic well-being and mental health, resulting in multi-generational harm. We support proposals that work to decrease the size, scope, and harm of the criminal legal system, and instead advocate for community resources and community-based solutions.

Gate Money Bill for Reentry Assistance: New York has among the highest recidivism rates among the states: roughly 50% of those returning from prison end up being reincarcerated within three years. One contributing factor to high recidivism rates is that those leaving prison currently receive only \$200 in "gate money" to transition back into their communities. This bill provides for a maximum payment of \$2550 to eligible individuals, paid in \$425 monthly installments for six months. The "gate money bill" will directly address the inextricable link between poverty and incarceration, building off the success of a pandemic relief response program that distributed over \$4.3 million to over 1700 formerly incarcerated New Yorkers (S4078/A193).

Oppose Rollback of Discovery Law Reforms: Citizen Action joins its allies in opposing Governor Hochul's Executive Budget proposal to make sweeping changes to Kalief's Law, effective in 2020, which improved state discovery processes to ensure that criminal defendants had sufficient information about the case against them and in a more timely fashion to mount an adequate defense. The law is named after Kalief Browder, who spent three years at Rikers Island, as his family could not afford to pay the \$3,000 bail set by a Bronx judge. He had no access to the government's evidence in his case. He died by suicide after his release. The governor's proposals would: 1) end "open-file" discovery in New York, allowing prosecutors to redact any information from discovery material that they deem irrelevant without judicial approval, 2) remove incentives for police to turn over relevant evidence to the prosecution, which then would have to be turned over to the defense, and 3) significantly weaken the current standards mandating prosecutors to turn over evidence, causing cases to drag on and innocent defendants to languish in jail. The legislature should resist any proposal to weaken Kalief's Law.

Ending Labor Exploitation in Prisons: The 13th Amendment ended chattel slavery, but with an insidious exception: slavery is permitted “as a punishment for crime.” For 150 years, New York has taken advantage of this exception to build a penal system so dependent on human exploitation that it is akin to modern-day slavery. Currently, incarcerated people are forced to work under threats like solitary confinement, delayed parole, and revocation of family visits, all for minimal pay. We therefore support the No Slavery in NY Act, which would amend the state constitution to outlaw forced labor for incarcerated persons (S225*3412*). Passage of a companion bill, the Fairness and Opportunity for Incarcerated Workers Act (S6747*) is also essential. This bill would institute health and safety protections for incarcerated workers, a fair minimum wage (currently 10 cents an hour), and improved skills and job training programs that provide viable pathways to employment post release.

Treatment Not Jails: This bill would expand the state’s judicial diversion law by including people with mental health challenges, and intellectual, neurological, physical, and other disabilities, who can benefit from treatment (S4547/A4869).

“Connecting Families” Legislation: This legislation would make phone calls in prisons and jails free. One in three families goes into debt to support an incarcerated loved one, and this legislation would help ease that burden (S4160/A2266).

Parole Reform: Citizen Action supports the “elder parole bill,” which would require the granting of parole consideration to all people aged 55 or older who have served at least 15 years in prison, regardless of their original sentence (S454/A514). We also support the “fair and timely parole bill,” which would end repeated parole denials based on the severity of the original charge and require the Parole Board to parole all individuals at their first hearing, unless evidence is presented of an unreasonable risk to public safety (S159/A127).

Communities Not Cages: Citizen Action supports this bill package, which seeks to end extreme sentences in our state that are a remnant of the Rockefeller Drug Law era. At present, harsh sentences are used to coerce plea deals, resulting in 98% of cases ending in pleas rather than giving defendants a fair day in court. The Communities Not Cages bill package includes the Eliminate Mandatory Minimums Act (S1209/A1297), the Second Look Act (S158/A1283), and the Earned Time Act (S342/A1085).

The Jury of Our Peers Act: Unlike most states, New York law permanently bans people with past felony convictions from serving on juries – no matter what the offense was or how long ago the conviction. Given New York’s long history of racialized policing and prosecution, this law is responsible in significant part for the underrepresentation of people of color, and Black people in particular, in jury pools across the state. The Jury of Our Peers Act, vetoed by the governor in December of 2024, would allow New Yorkers to participate in jury service immediately upon release – the same time period when New Yorkers with conviction histories are currently able to exercise their right to vote (S206*/A1432*).

HEALTH CARE EQUITY

Health care is a human right. Every New Yorker should be able to get the care they need without the fear of financial ruin. Despite the progress made due to the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA) and state actions to expand access to health insurance coverage, over a million New Yorkers remain without insurance. Care is still unaffordable and out of reach for far too many New Yorkers due to out-of-pocket costs, insurer care denials and delays, and restrictive provider networks. In addition, our health care resources and reimbursement rates for healthcare providers are allocated in an unequal manner, resulting in less access and worse health outcomes for low-income people, rural communities, and people of color. Hospitals and other health care institutions must be held accountable if we are to get the quality health care we are entitled to.

Health Insurance Coverage and Affordability: In concert with multiple partners (including Health Care for All York, Medicaid Matters, and the Campaign for New York Health), Citizen Action supports a total overhaul of our state health insurance system through the creation of a public, universal coverage “single-payer” program known as New York Health. At the same time, we believe it’s critical to advance reforms that provide relief to those who face difficulties affording and accessing care. Our proposals in this area follow:

- **Primary Care Investment Act:** Primary care is critical to maintaining good health, managing chronic conditions, and preventing disease. Investment in primary care is also more cost effective for the health system. Nationally, primary care accounts for approximately 35% of all health care visits each year – yet only about 5%-7% of all health care expenditures are for primary care (no data is available for New York). This bill creates primary care spending goals for health insurance plans, requiring them to measure and report the percentage of their overall spending that is devoted to primary care. Plans that spend less than 12.5% on primary care would be mandated to increase their primary care spending by 1% each year until they reach 12.5% (S1634/A1915).
- **Immigrant Coverage:** Immigrants make up the largest share of uninsured New Yorkers. Together with the Coverage4All campaign, we are advocating for legislation to provide comprehensive low-cost coverage through the state’s successful Essential Plan to low- and moderate-income immigrants (below 250% of the federal poverty level) who are excluded from federally funded coverage because of their immigration status. The Essential Plan currently provides comprehensive coverage to over 1.1 million New Yorkers with no enrollee premiums or deductibles. Both California and Illinois have already taken significant steps to extend immigrant coverage (S3762/A1710).

- **New York Health Act:** Under the New York Health Act, patients will not be charged any premiums, deductibles or copays. All New Yorkers will have access to all medically necessary care without health insurance middlemen. The system would be funded through a progressive income tax on payroll and non-payroll income (S3425/A1466).
- **Premium Cliffs:** We support the elimination of the premium cliffs for the Child Health Plus (CHP) program by expanding subsidies to New Yorkers making between 400% and 600% of the federal poverty level (FPL) using surplus Essential Plan funds.
- **Medicaid Asset Test:** People who are over 65 years old or who have disabilities must pass an asset test to qualify for Medicaid. However, younger people without disabilities can enroll without any asset test. We support legislation to increase the asset test limit to \$300,000 for those who are blind, certified disabled or who are over 65 (S3554/A1043). Citizen Action also supports eventual elimination of the asset test so that all New Yorkers have the same access to Medicaid when they need it.
- **Asthma Inhalers:** Citizen Action supports legislation to require insurance coverage for asthma inhalers at no cost. Nationally, the prevalence of asthma is higher among people of color, low-income people and LGBTQ+ people. In New York, Black and Hispanic people are much more likely to go to the emergency room for asthma-related reasons. Asthma-related deaths are considerably higher in Black and Puerto Rican populations compared with White populations (S1804/A128).

Patients' Rights and Hospital Prices: Patients should have a level playing field when interacting with the health care system. They should have all the information they need to make good decisions and exercise their right to access medical care, and unreasonable burdens should not be placed on receiving care.

- **Hospital Closures and Curtailment of Services:** Citizen Action supports the Local Input in Community Healthcare Act, which would require written notification to the Department of Health and affected communities and a public hearing to be held by the state Health Commissioner when hospitals propose to close hospitals entirely or to close maternity, emergency, mental health and substance abuse services. Current law requires public hearings after a hospital closes, when it is too late for communities to participate in any planning. Hospital closures and downsizings have reduced access to care, particularly in lower-income communities and communities of color, with serious repercussions for health outcomes. The bill was vetoed by the governor in 2024 (S8843*/A1633*).

- **Stop SUNY Hospital Suing:** Citizen Action supports legislation to prohibit state-operated hospitals from suing patients for medical debt. Over 80,000 patients have been sued by New York's non-profit and state-operated hospitals. State-operated hospitals in New York receive over \$500 million a year in state and federal funding for uncompensated care, but they are among the biggest entities that sue patients for medical debt (S359/A1356).

Funding for Outreach and Consumer Assistance: We support adequate funding in the FY 2025-26 budget for several programs that assist patients with enrolling in health insurance and using their coverage. Our priorities are:

- \$38 million for the state navigator program, which helps New Yorkers enroll in coverage that meets their needs; this funding level would allow the program to maintain current service levels.
- \$6.5 million for Community Health Advocates, an enormously successful program that helps consumers with problems like bill disputes and that has saved patients \$180 million since 2010.
- A new \$5 million grant program to fund community-based organizations to conduct outreach in communities with high rates of people without health coverage.

HOUSING JUSTICE

Everyone deserves guaranteed housing that is safe and dignified, regardless of their income or social status. Corporate developers, predatory property owners, and some elected officials are keeping our communities stuck in a housing system that forces people to choose between paying rent and buying food. As a result, we have 158,000 homeless adults and children in New York and millions more who are just one emergency away from losing their homes. Unjust evictions, unfair rent hikes, and unsafe living conditions disproportionately affect Black and Brown people.

Social Development Authority and Tenant Power Act: This bill would create a Social Housing Development Authority (SHDA) – a new, well-capitalized public developer that can build, acquire, rehabilitate, and preserve affordable housing throughout the state. Unlike housing built by private developers, the SDHA would reinvest all excess proceeds for public purposes, like improving maintenance and expanding social housing stock. The Authority would also build extremely affordable units, as well as middle-income units, subsidizing construction with existing state operating subsidies like project-based housing vouchers. With an initial \$5 billion capitalization, the SHDA could create or acquire 26,000 new homes statewide (S8494*/A9088*).

Investments in Public Housing: Public housing, which provides the only truly affordable housing to hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, is crumbling. Citizen Action calls on the legislature and the governor to meaningfully increase funding for public housing on an annual basis. This should be done with dedicated and recurring revenue streams to meaningfully address the housing crisis for low-income people.

Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA): The sale, foreclosure, or demolition of rental buildings is deeply destabilizing for individual tenants and communities. TOPA is therefore needed to give residents the option to purchase the buildings in such circumstances where their apartments are located, individually or as a group. Legislation similar to TOPA has been enacted in Washington D.C. and San Francisco (S401/A3353*). New York should also provide \$200 million in funding for the first year to support this program.

Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP): This bill would create a permanent, statewide section 8-like rental assistance program. At least 50% of the funding will be dedicated to helping homeless New Yorkers across the state to find stable housing. The rest will fund eviction prevention for households at risk of becoming homeless. The federal Section 8

program is successful because it meets households where they are: as incomes rise and fall, the tenant's share of the rent rises and falls. A similar state program would reach those New Yorkers left out by the federal program due to insufficient funding and the exclusion of groups like undocumented residents (S72/A1704). We are requesting \$250 million for the first year of the program.

Right to Counsel: Citizen Action supports legislation to significantly strengthen the existing New York City tenant right to counsel protections and to expand the right to counsel to tenants statewide. The right would attach to any legal proceeding that could result in a tenant losing his or her home. Under this legislation, tenants would be represented throughout their entire case. The State would be required to contract with nonprofit legal services organizations to provide counsel and with nonprofit community-based organizations to provide education on tenants' rights. Access to legal representation in eviction proceedings dramatically increases the ability of tenants to stay housed. In New York City, 86% of tenants who had a right to counsel were able to stay in their homes. The states and cities with right to counsel provisions have seen up to a 77% reduction in evictions (S2721*/A4669).

UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE AND EDUCATION JUSTICE

Every child, regardless of his or her zip code, deserves high-quality childcare and a public education system that enables them to grow emotionally, mentally, culturally, and creatively. To achieve this goal, Citizen Action and the Alliance for Quality Education (AQE) still have much more to accomplish, despite the landmark 2021 budget agreement finally meeting the requirements of the 2007 reformed education funding formula that arose from the Campaign for Fiscal Equity litigation. We will continue to fight for a fully funded education system, where every school's mission is to provide an excellent education in an environment conducive to teaching and learning and to expand family and community engagement. Equally important is guaranteeing that every child and family has affordable, accessible childcare options. Fundamental to this goal is ensuring that childcare providers have adequate wages and benefits.

Foundation Aid: Citizen Action is campaigning in 2025 with AQE to ensure that existing public school funding levels through the Foundation Aid formula are maintained, and that no cuts to public schools are made. The Foundation Aid formula also needs to be updated to reflect current student need, including updates on the poverty counts used and to take regional costs into account. In order to provide the level of public school funding mandated by the current school aid formula, schools must receive a \$1.4 billion funding increase in FY 2025-26.

Expanding Child Care: There is wide agreement in our state that children are a priority. The problem is establishing and maintaining a childcare and education system that reflects this consensus. Yet wages for childcare providers – almost entirely women and people of color – lag behind virtually all other professions, making retention of qualified staff extraordinarily difficult. Further, there are major issues with access to quality programs. Citizen Action, along with the Empire State Campaign for Child Care and AQE, therefore supports \$1.2 billion in funding to create a permanent childcare fund to ensure that providers are compensated equitably so that childcare is available regardless of zip code. If we value the well-being of our children, improving the working conditions and compensation of childcare providers must be a top priority.

Addressing Child Poverty – the “Baby Bucks” Bill: Citizen Action supports including the “Baby Bucks” bill in the budget, at an estimated cost of \$247.5 million. This bill creates a state-funded pilot program to provide direct cash payments for low-income mothers during the last three months of pregnancy and the first 18 months of a child’s life. Childhood poverty is an escalating crisis in New York and across the nation, disproportionately impacting families of color. Nationally, the poverty rate for children more than doubled from 2021 to 2022 (from a historic low of 5.2% in 2021 to 12.4% in 2022), erasing previous record gains. In New York State, the child poverty rate has hovered around 20% for decades, with far more Black and Latino children experiencing poverty than white children. This is a statewide phenomenon: more than 50% of Rochester children and just under 50% of Buffalo children lived in poverty in a recent year. Data reveals that direct cash payments have a positive impact, not just on poverty, but on other measures of well-being, like maternal health and math and reading achievement (S2132/A1597).

Working Families Tax Credit: We support the New York State Working Families Tax Credit bill, which would address the failure of the federal government to renew the child tax credit that had lifted millions of children and their families out of poverty. This bill, which has a \$2 billion price tag, would streamline the state’s existing Empire State Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit, and provide greater assistance to families whose children live in poverty. It is estimated that this could reduce child poverty in New York by up to 19.6% for children under the age of 18 living in deep poverty (S2082/A3474).

Solutions Not Suspensions: All children deserve safe schools with supportive and respectful relationships with teachers and staff. We will therefore continue to campaign for the Solutions not Suspensions Act, which will help encourage the use of positive and age-appropriate disciplinary strategies, reduce the frequency and duration of school suspensions, eliminate the use of out-of-school suspensions for minor infractions and suspensions for students grades pre-K through grade 3 unless federally mandated, ensure that students receive instruction when they are removed from school, and limit unnecessary contacts between law enforcement and students (S134/A118). We also request \$5 million in new funding for the training for educators and school personnel to implement policies consistent with the bill that will provide alternatives to suspension.