



Respect and Dignity for All:

Make the Road New York's 2021 State Policy & Budget Platform

As the largest community based membership organization representing immigrants and working-class people of color in New York, Make the Road New York (MRNY) is uniquely positioned to identify and address pressing community needs. Through its community centers in New York City, Long Island and Westchester, MRNY employs a multi-faceted approach to supporting immigrants, communities of color, and working-class New Yorkers, providing a full range of legal, educational and survival services.

RECOVERY FOR ALL

The communities we represent have been utterly devastated by COVID-19, with staggering loss of life and calamitous economic consequences. Our platform for 2021 thus centers demands for a recovery for all and targeted policy priorities to address inequity and brutality laid bare during 2020 and the pandemic.

■ **Fund Excluded Workers** (Ramos | De La Rosa): Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers are blocked from unemployment and all income relief - due to immigration status or recent incarceration - creating a humanitarian crisis as well as a disaster for the entire economy. The Mark-to-Market Tax would tax the unrealized capital gains of billionaires and raise an estimated \$23 billion in year one - more than enough for an Excluded Workers Disaster Income Replacement Fund - with flat monthly benefits pegged to what a typical worker would receive if eligible for Unemployment - with more than \$20 billion remaining.

■ **Cancel Rent: "Rent and Mortgage Cancellation Act of 2020"** (Salazar | Niou): Due to the novel coronavirus, households across New York State have lost income and are facing rent debts that they will never be able to pay back. This situation is especially dire for constituents excluded from existing programs. With 92,000 New Yorkers already homeless and millions more on the brink of eviction, our state must act to protect renters and homeowners.

■ **Raise the revenue that our schools and communities need through the Invest in Our New York revenue package.** This package would generate \$50 billion for state coffers by fixing inequities in the tax system that result in low income New Yorkers paying drastically higher taxes than the ultra-wealthy and corporations pay. These measures include new income tax brackets and higher rates for the super-rich, a fix to the federal capital gains offset, mark-to-market tax, an inheritance tax, corporate tax, and financial transaction taxes, designed to avoid tax evasion strategies enabled if we act on only one of these angles.

■ **Repeal the "Walking While Trans" Ban** (S1351 Hoylman | Paulin): Section 240.37 - "Loitering for the purpose of engaging in a prostitution offense" - causes irreparable harm to transgender, gender non-binary, gender-expansive and queer communities of color in New York, particularly transgender woman of color, because it gives the police excessive discretion and emboldens biased policing. MRNY members have shared stories about being arrested for merely standing outside, speaking to one another, or walking from the subway to their home. Section 240.37 is disastrous during COVID, putting vulnerable New Yorkers into a criminal justice system where the pandemic is rampant, and also carries immigration consequences that can lead to deportation as a result of biased policing.

ADVANCE JUSTICE and STRENGTHEN CIVIL RIGHTS PROTECTIONS

■ **Pass the Solutions Not Suspensions Act** (Nolan) to end harsh and ineffective school disciplinary practices that disproportionately impact youth of color and students with disabilities. New York's antiquated, racially biased school discipline policies are pushing marginalized students out of school and into the criminal legal system. Outside of NYC, Black students are 10% of all students but 31% of all students suspended. In NYC, Black students are 23% of all students, but 50% of those suspended. Students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be suspended. One suspension in high school can double the likelihood that a student drops out. This would ensure that school districts implement codes of conduct limiting the use of suspensions as a disciplinary response to minor infractions, reduce loss of instructional time, and encourage the use of restorative justice and positive alternatives to suspensions.

■ **Stop Violence in the Sex Trades Act (SVSTA)** (Salazar | Gottfried): People who trade sex or who identify as sex workers, whether as a form of survival or as a choice, have historically been harassed and criminalized by the police. Those most impacted are Black and undocumented transgender women, because of a criminal record that continues to bar them from access to opportunities and can result in deportation. This legislation will amend NY Penal Law article 230 for consenting adults who trade sex for resources and/or money. It will decriminalize the action of collaborating with peers, patronizing adult sex workers, allow a working space where business are permitted. This bill upholds all anti-trafficking statuses that protect survivors and minors from exploitation and coercion.

■ Pass the **EMPIRE State Licensing Act** (Rivera | A1952 Cruz) to prevent immigrant New Yorkers from being denied a professional, occupational, commercial, or business license, permit, certificate, or registration on account of their immigration or citizenship status.

ENSURE HEALTHCARE ACCESS DURING AND BEYOND COVID-19

■ **Ensure Immigrant Healthcare Access** (Rivera | A1585 Gottfried) and implement a comprehensive solution in the **New York Health Act** (Rivera | Gottfried) – Allocate \$13 million to create a temporary state-funded Essential Plan for all New Yorkers with income up to 200% of the federal poverty level, who have had COVID-19 and are excluded from coverage because of their immigration status. New York should also dedicate a portion of new revenue to make ALL low-income undocumented New Yorkers eligible for the Essential Plan (Rivera | Gottfried). And we must advance a comprehensive solution - the New York Health Act - to finally make health care affordable for all.

■ **Pass the Patient Medical Debt Protection Act** (Rivera | Gottfried): Eliminate unfair billing practices by requiring clear, consolidated hospital bills and capping medical debt interest rates at 3%. Would also protect patients from unfair fees and surprise out-of-network bills caused by provider or plan misinformation; and reduce the statute of limitations on medical debt to two years from six.

■ **Maintain funding for the Community Health Advocates Program at \$3.4 million.** Community Health Advocates (CHA) provides one-on-one assistance to individuals across the state, helping individuals navigate the complex health system. CHA advocates troubleshoot the problems that individuals face and help those who are not eligible for insurance access low cost care and hospital financial assistance. CHA saves tax dollars — without the program individuals end up in expensive emergency room treatments.

KEEP NEW YORKERS IN THEIR HOMES

■ **Pass new “good cause” eviction legislation to bring renters’ rights to tenants in smaller buildings** (Salazar | Hunter): Despite major steps forward in 2019, millions of tenants still have virtually no protections against horrific housing conditions, unfair eviction, and harassment. This is because rent

stabilization only applies to buildings with 6 or more units. As large corporate landlords buy up smaller buildings, tenants face escalating rents and displacement. It is imperative that we bring rent relief to smaller buildings. Good cause eviction would bring the right to a renewal lease, at rent increases set by local price index, to all tenants.

PROTECT WORKERS while RAISING NEEDED REVENUE

■ **Make the promise of a \$15 minimum wage real by passing the EmPIRE Worker Protection Act** (Hoylman | Joyner) **to help enforce wage theft and equal pay laws.** COVID has resulted in workers desperate for income being left almost entirely without relief. First, the NYS Department of Labor (DOL) is overwhelmed. Second, corporations' use of forced arbitration agreements is compelling workers to waive their right to be heard by a judge and jury if their employer illegally exploits them. New York State cannot ban forced arbitration agreements. But we CAN improve the public's ability to hold law-breakers accountable. The EmPIRE Worker Protection Act extends the DOL's reach by allowing workers and advocates to step in and represent the public, helping to fund the NYS DOL.

■ **Pass the New York Hero Act** (Gianaris S1034 | Reyes) to mandate enforceable COVID safety standards in workplaces and establish worker safety committees to monitor compliance.

CANCEL CUTS and SUSTAIN COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

■ **Restore 100% of withheld funding to Non-profit organizations** impacted by withheld or delayed funding during 2019 and 2020.

■ **Invest \$25m in NYSED Funding for Adult Literacy Education (ALE): Maintain last year's \$7.8m investment and increase ALE by \$17.2 million.** Community-based Adult Education is critical to enabling New Yorkers to get and keep jobs, continue on career paths and support children's academic success. Changes to the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act have slashed funding for English and Civics instruction in New York. ALE is one of the few funding streams able to address the current and expected new need by supporting community-based English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE) and High School Equivalency (HSE) programs. Expanding ALE would allow the State to help fill the gap created by changes to WIOA-funded programs.