



Respect and Dignity for All:

Make the Road New York's 2023-24 State Policy Platform

As the largest community-based, membership organization representing immigrants and working-class people of color in New York State, with 25,000 members, Make the Road New York (MRNY) is uniquely positioned to identify and address pressing community needs. Through its network of community centers in New York City, Long Island and Westchester, MRNY employs a multi-faceted approach to supporting immigrant, communities of color, and working-class New Yorkers, providing a full range of legal, educational and survival services. The communities we represent and serve have been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and are now facing rising housing, food, and other costs, while wages have not kept pace. Meanwhile, many of our members remain unjustly excluded from key safety net programs like unemployment and health insurance, as well as tenant protections. Our 2023-24 state policy platform centers on smart solutions to address the persistent inequities across our state and improve the lives of immigrant, Black, and brown families across New York State. The Legislature and Governor Hochul should enact the following to help ensure that all New Yorkers are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve:

(Note: > indicates budget-focused items.)

PROTECT IMMIGRANT NEW YORKERS

> **Unemployment Bridge Program** (Ramos S3192 | Reyes A4821): After the creation of a first-in-the-nation \$2.1 billion fund that reached more than 131,000 workers excluded from unemployment and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, the state legislature and Governor must now ensure permanent inclusion in the unemployment system for all. We urge passage of S8165|A9037 to establish a permanent unemployment insurance program that can be accessed by excluded workers who currently contribute to social safety net programs, but are excluded from unemployment insurance. \$500 million will create the Unemployment Bridge Program, which will provide up to \$1200/month in economic support to workers ineligible for unemployment. Prime beneficiaries will be immigrant workers without authorization, cash economy workers, freelancers and justice-impacted people. This program can serve up to 50,000 people per month. This program will be funded through an innovative revenue source - a Digital Ad Tax (DATA), which anticipates close to \$1 billion in annual revenue.

> **Ensure Immigrant Healthcare Access (Coverage4All)** (Rivera S2237 | Gonzalez-Rojas A3020): The state should expand the Essential Plan to all income-eligible New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status. Immigrants make up a disproportionate share of uninsured New Yorkers. Roughly 245,000 New Yorkers remain uninsured because of their immigration status. The Coverage4All bill would open the Essential Plan to cover all New Yorkers earning up to 250% of the federal poverty level with health insurance regardless of immigration status. This would occur through a federal section 1332 waiver, which could secure federal funding for this coverage extension. In the absence of the waiver, the same population would be covered through state-funded Medicaid. Passing Coverage4All is a critical step towards achieving universal coverage which we support through the New York Health Act.

KEEP NEW YORKERS IN THEIR HOMES

■ **Pass “Good Cause” eviction legislation to bring renters’ rights to tenants in smaller buildings** (Salazar S305 | Hunter A4454): Approximately 5 million tenants in small homes have no protections against unjust evictions. As large corporate landlords buy up smaller buildings, tenants face escalating rents and displacement. It is imperative that we bring basic protections to tenants in smaller buildings. Good cause eviction legislation would enable tenants to organize for the living conditions they deserve, and protect tenants from exorbitant rent increases, which often are effectively the same as an eviction notice.

➤ **Create a Housing Access Voucher Program to help tenants stay in their units and fight homelessness and displacement** (Kavanagh S568A | Rosenthal A4021): New York’s homelessness and affordability crisis continues to grow, and New York City in particular has also received thousands of asylum seekers in need of housing. The proposed program would allocate \$250 million annually for Housing Access Vouchers, setting aside 50% of the vouchers created for households at risk of homelessness and 50% for homeless individuals and families. Voucher recipients would contribute a maximum of 30% of their monthly adjusted income towards rent and the rest would be covered by the voucher. It would also be accessible to all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status, a first in the state.

ADVANCE JUSTICE and STRENGTHEN CIVIL RIGHTS PROTECTIONS

■ **Pass the Solutions Not Suspensions Act** (Jackson S1040): This bill would 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. Black students in New York are more than four times as likely to be suspended from school than their white counterparts. Resulting in the loss of critical instructional time and ultimately leading towards dropping out. This bill would ensure that school districts implement codes of conduct that limit the use of suspensions as a disciplinary response to minor infractions, reduce loss of instructional time, and encourage the use of restorative practices and positive alternatives to suspensions.

■ **Stop Violence in the Sex Trades Act (SVSTA)** (Salazar 4396): 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 on the job by the police. The most impacted people are Black and brown, undocumented transgender and cisgender women whose criminalization leads to obstacles to accessing city and state based programs, and whose criminalization can also result in a deportation. This legislation will amend NY Penal Law article 230 to decriminalize the sale and purchase of sexual services for resources, services and/or money for consenting adults. This legislation will allow for sex workers to have safer working environments, consistent with a harm reduction approach. It will also vacate the records of those who have been arrested, convicted and/or incarcerated for engaging in sex work no longer criminalized.

ENSURE OUR COMMUNITIES HAVE THE RESOURCES THEY NEED

➤ **Pass the Invest in our New York package** (Corporate Tax, Hoylman S1980 | Kelles, Shrestha A3690; Progressive Income Tax, Jackson S2059 | Meeks A3115; Capital Gains Tax, Rivera S2162 | Kim A2576; Mark-to-market Billionaires Tax, Ramos S1570 | Kelles A3252; Heirs Tax, Brisport S2782 | Solages A3193): The Invest in Our New York Act is a package of state bills that would raise tens of billions of dollars to ensure we can take care of each other and rebuild our economy by ending tax breaks for the wealthiest New Yorkers. This revenue will prove crucial to prevent cuts to public programs and invest in high quality education, jobs, housing, accessibility and healthcare. It would also ensure revenue benefits the most vulnerable communities, including low-income New Yorkers, communities of color, workers excluded from federal unemployment, people with disabilities and essential workers.

ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES SUPPORTED THIS YEAR:

- **Support the Fair & Timely Implementation of Landmark Fair Elections Legislation:** The 2019 budget agreement created a matching funds program for all Assembly, Senate and statewide races. The matching funds program goes into effect after the November 2022 general election. For the state to meet the anticipated fiscal needs associated with this program, the state budget must include \$70 million in money to be used for matching funds by the State Board of Elections.
- **Raise the Minimum Wage** (Ramos S1978 | Joyner A2204): Workers deserve wages that can sustain their families. With prices rising at the fastest pace in 40 years, the real value of New York’s \$15 minimum wage—which has not increased since late 2018—has already fallen by 15% and will fall by more than 30% by 2026 unless the legislature acts. To restore the lost value of the frozen \$15 minimum wage, New York should raise the wage to \$21.25 in NYC, Long Island and Westchester and \$20 upstate—all by 2026, with annual indexing to inflation thereafter.
- **Move Closer to Universal Child Care:** New York has to keep moving toward universal child care, by committing to creating a high-quality, culturally responsive, universal child care system within four years. This year, New York must maintain the momentum by continuing to expand access to subsidies for child care and school-age child care for lower-income New York families regardless of employment or immigration status or any other factor, invest a substantial amount of funding in raising child care workforce compensation, and making the system more accessible by removing unnecessary bureaucratic barriers.
- **Ensure Full Funding of Public Schools:** Public schools continue to be owed operating aid also known as Foundation Aid. Fully funding the final year of the 3 year phase of Foundation Aid in the upcoming state budget will finally bring the state in compliance with the state constitution.
- **Increase ALE funding to \$27.9 million:** The state should renew current Adult Literacy Education funding (ALE) at \$9.3 million to keep programs whole; invest an additional \$9.3 million in FY24 for the ALE Stabilization and Enhancement Fund to begin to stabilize and enhance ALE programs by increasing the rate per student and allowing providers to better serve the 6,600 New Yorkers enrolled; and invest an additional \$9.3 million in FY24 to reach and serve an additional 3,300 students at an increased rate per student. ALE is one of the few state funding streams able to address the need for flexible adult education services by supporting community-based English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE) and High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation programs. Expanding ALE would increase per-student funding in Adult Literacy Education through strategic investments in resources, services, and supports, such as technology, counseling/case management. This will lead to greater outcomes and a wider range of impacts for adult literacy students, their families, and their communities.
- **Restore funding for the Community Health Advocates Program to \$5.2 million and increase Navigator funding to \$38 million:** The Community Health Advocates Program (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 post-enrollment and help individuals 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. Funding should also be increased for the Navigators program, which provides one-on-one assistance helping individuals enroll in any form of health insurance through the Marketplace. The state should also create a \$5 million grant program to fund community-based organizations to conduct outreach in communities with high rates of uninsured individuals.
- **Update New York Hospital Financial Assistance Law (HFAL)** (Rivera S1366): Update New York’s Hospital Financial Assistance Law (HFAL) to comply with Affordable Care Act (ACA) requirements to facilitate patients’ access to financial assistance. Annually, New York’s nonprofit hospitals receive \$1.1 billion in Indigent Care Pool (ICP) funds to support uncompensated care for low-income patients. However, these funds are often too difficult

for patients to access. The HFAL needs to be updated so that patients can find and apply on one uniform application that extends eligibility limits consistent with the New York State of Health Marketplace.

■ **Pass the Access to Representation Act (ARA) to ensure Universal Representation for New Yorkers Facing Deportation** (Hoylman S999 | Cruz A170): Immigrants targeted by federal enforcement for deportation do not currently have the right to a lawyer if they cannot afford one. New York State has been the national leader in supporting legal services for immigrants, yet even with strong existing programs, more than fifty thousand people in New York are currently fighting for their lives in immigration court on their own. Increased funding for existing and new immigration legal services in the FY24 budget is a critical step, but the imperative is clear: passage of the Access to Representation Act is needed to support strong communities, economic stability, fairness, and dignity. Establishing a right to a government-funded lawyer for people at risk of deportation is essential. Having a lawyer makes a huge difference: detained immigrants with lawyers win their cases at 10.5 times the rate of those who don't have legal help. For non-detained people, 60 percent with lawyers win their cases compared to 17 percent of those without a lawyer. Our immigration system is nearly impossible to navigate without counsel, and legal assistance should not depend upon the ability to afford it.