



**Testimony of Rev. West McNeill, NYS Labor-Religion Coalition Program Director
On Behalf of The Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice**

**Submitted to NYS Senate Finance & Assembly Ways & Means Committee Chairs
For February 27, 2025 Joint Legislative Hearing on the Revenue Budget**

Introduction:

Dear Senate Finance Chair Krueger, Assembly Ways & Means Chair Pretlow, and members of the New York State Legislature:

My name is Rev. West McNeill, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of The Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice, where I am the NYS Labor-Religion Coalition Program Director. The NYS Labor-Religion Coalition organizes faith leaders and communities across New York, advocates alongside labor and grassroots partners for pro-worker, anti-poverty policies, and offers programming to equip faith, labor, and other community leaders for movement-building work. Through our work connecting grassroots leaders, religious organizations, and advocacy efforts across the state, we have seen firsthand how growing poverty and inequality are devastating poor and working-class communities in New York State. We are extremely concerned about how impending federal funding cuts may make conditions even worse for New York families.

The 2026 fiscal year budget provides a critical opportunity to get ahead of federal funding cuts that will significantly impact New York and address our state's growing affordability crisis. The Trump administration and Republican majority are planning to cut \$2 to \$5 trillion from critical programs to pay for even more tax cuts for the super-rich and highly profitable corporations – programs like Medicaid, SNAP benefits, support for students with disabilities, and more. This is critical funding that New York communities rely on, and choosing not to address the funding gap – in whole or in part – is unconscionable. Fortunately, there is a common sense, popular way to make deep, long-term, sustainable investments in the public programs and services

millions of New Yorkers rely on: making the ultra-rich and most profitable corporations pay what they owe in taxes.

Low-income, working-class families are being driven out of our state as a result of rampant unaffordability. Meanwhile, New York's millionaire and billionaire class keep growing

- According to a [December 2023 report](#) covered by the New York Times, the people who left New York at the highest rate in 2022 were families making between \$32,000 and \$65,000 a year. A disproportionate number of those movers were Black and Latine families.
- A new Americans for Tax Fairness analysis shows that New York now has 128 billionaires with over 780 billion dollars in wealth, and their wealth has soared by 74% since the Trump tax cuts went into effect in 2017. Another study found that 1 in 24 people living in New York City alone are millionaires.
- Over 2.78 million New Yorkers (14.2% of the state's population) live in poverty. According to a January 2025 report from Comptroller DiNapoli, homelessness in our state doubled between January 2022 and January 2024. There are more than 158,000 people who are homeless in our state, a third of whom are children.

The state must take bold action to address New York's child poverty crisis.

- New Census data shows that Syracuse has the highest child poverty rate in the country, with Rochester and Buffalo also in the top 10. In the three years since Governor Hochul signed the Child Poverty Reduction Act committing to cut child poverty in half by 2031, child poverty in our state has actually increased.
- The Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC) recently recommended increasing the Child Tax Credit from \$330 to \$1,500 for children 0-17, which would cut official child poverty by 23%. However, Governor Hochul's proposal for a \$1,000 credit for children under 4 and \$500 for ages 4-16 would only cut child poverty by 8%.
- While we welcome the Governor's focus on making life more affordable through policies like expanded Child Tax Credit and universal school meals, these proposals fall far short of what's needed and possible. Policies that merely tinker around the edges of poverty and inequality are not enough.
- In addition to increasing the Child Tax Credit, the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council recommendations include:

- Creating a state rental assistance program to serve income-eligible renting households. The program would cover the difference between the rent and 30% of household income, would be available to households regardless of immigration status, and would be an entitlement so that all income-eligible renting households would be able to access support.
- Doubling the Cash Assistance program benefit amount and indexing it to inflation.
- Creating a state Food Assistance Program that would cover the nearly 65,000 households with children that are currently excluded from participating in SNAP due to their family's immigration status.
- New York has the resources to make this transformative investment in our children and families - if we fairly tax the wealthiest corporations and households in our state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Lawmakers can address the affordability crisis by making the super-rich pay their fair share and investing in working-class communities and the programs we all rely on, including by following through on New York's commitment to cut child poverty.

- **The Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice supports the [Invest in Our New York package](#) which, if passed, would raise tens of billions of dollars through a combination of personal income tax increases on the top 5% of earners, corporate tax reforms targeting the most profitable corporations (fewer than the top 1%), and addressing loopholes that allow millionaires and billionaires to shield their wealth from their tax liability. The Invest in Our New York package includes the following proposals:**
 - The Progressive Income Tax Bill ([S1622-Jackson/A1281-Meeks](#)) would raise over \$21 billion annually by creating new brackets to the state's personal income tax structure. The bill would raise taxes on individuals earning over \$450,000 a year as single filers and \$500,000 as joint filers and would only impact our state's top 5% of income earners.
 - The Capital Gains Bill ([S1439-Rivera/A676-Kim](#)) would raise over \$12 billion annually by creating a surcharge tax on income generated by buying and selling stocks. The tax would only apply to people who earn over \$400,000 as single filers and \$500,000 as joint filers. Currently, people who earn their income

through buying and selling stocks have a federal tax benefit of up to 17%, meaning they pay far less in taxes than those who earn their income through hourly wages or other ordinary income. This bill would only raise taxes on less than 1% of New Yorkers. Washington State and Minnesota have successfully passed and implemented capital gains taxes in the last few years.

- Corporate Tax Reforms ([S953-Hoylman/A1971-Kelles, Shrestha](#)) would raise over \$7 billion annually by raising the corporate tax rates on corporations that make over \$2.5 million in profits in New York and creating additional progressive brackets for corporations earning over \$10 million in profit annually, and \$20 million in profit annually. These corporate tax reforms would apply to every corporation that does business in New York - not just those headquartered in the state. The changes in the bill would not kick in until corporate profits exceed \$2.5 million and not impact small businesses. Eighty percent of corporations in New York make less than \$15,000 in profits annually and pay less than \$1,000 in corporate taxes every year. As of 2020, fewer than 0.14% of corporations reached \$1 million in profits. We can raise taxes on the wealthiest corporations and remain competitive: New York currently has the 2nd lowest tax rate amongst the 12th northeastern states, and our current corporate tax rates are lower than they were in 1990.
- The Heirs Tax ([S914-Brisport/A2049-Solages](#)) would raise \$4 billion annually by replacing New York's existing estate tax by creating a tax that treats inherited income over \$250,000 as taxable income. The creation of this tax would impact less than 1% of inheritances - and those above \$250,000 would only be taxed at a low rate of 2.5%. The rate would increase for inheritances over \$1,000,000, which already wealthy individuals almost entirely receive.
- The Billionaires Tax ([S165-Ramos/A3632-Kelles](#)) would raise over \$33.3 billion in its first year and \$1.7 billion annually thereafter by creating a tax that targets the rising value of stocks and investment portfolios. This proposal creates a yearly tax on assets that have accumulated value, requiring billionaires to pay income tax rates on their investment gains. New York already has a system for assessing and taxing the increased value of items in the form of a property tax.
- **The Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice supports the full implementation of the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council's recommendations to meet New York's 50% child poverty reduction target.** A critical piece of these recommendations is strengthening and expanding New York's child tax credit by increasing the credit amount, making it more inclusive, and targeting the largest credit

to the lowest-income New Yorkers. Specifically, to have the greatest impact on child poverty and deliver the greatest tax savings to families struggling to make ends meet, we urge the Legislature to build upon the Executive Budget's proposal by:

- restructuring the state's child tax credit, the Empire State Child Credit (ESCC), as proposed in the Executive Budget, so the highest credit goes to the lowest-income families, by ending regressive minimum income requirements and phase-ins;
- increasing the credit amount of the ESCC to \$1,500 per child per year for all children 0- 18, as recommended by the State's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council, to provide families meaningful support;
- indexing the credit to inflation so that families continue to receive the full value of the credit
- ensuring that all of these changes are permanent so that families can rely on the credit each year.

Closing:

As the Trump administration and Congress prepare to cut taxes on the wealthy and cut safety net programs, New York must take the opposite path to invest in our families and communities. In this context, it is all the more urgent for New York to marshal the abundant resources of our state to help struggling families weather the challenges to come. The Senate and the Assembly must put forward one-house budgets that include proposals to raise revenue from the ultra-wealthy and invest it in meeting New York's obligations to its residents, especially its children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.