



**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York State Assembly and New York State Senate
Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the FY 2026-FY 2027 Executive Budget
Topic: Human Services**

**Assembly Committee on Ways & Means, Assemblymember Gary Pretlow, Chair
Senate Committee on Finance, Senator Liz Krueger, Chair**

**Assembly Committee of Social Services, Assemblymember Maritza Davila, Chair
Senate Committee on Social Services, Senator Roxanne J. Persaud, Chair**

**Assembly Committee on Children and Families, Assemblymember Andrew Hevesi, Chair
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**Assembly Committee on Aging, Assemblymember Rebecca A. Seawright, Chair
Senate Committee on Aging, Senator Cordell Cleare, Chair**

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the FY 2026-2027 Executive Budget and Human Services. United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing neighborhood-based settlement houses that reach more than 840,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life, including 140,000 under age 25, at over 800 locations each year.

A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

In a year of potentially drastic budgetary impacts from the new federal administration that comes amidst a deep affordability crisis facing New York families, UNH looks to our State Legislative leaders to preserve and strengthen the safety net programs outlined below, and to develop a comprehensive, long-term plan for ensuring affordability and economic security for all New Yorkers. Specifically, we outline budget priorities for the following priorities:

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Settlement House Program

The Settlement House Program provides innovative funding for community-based supportive services for children and families at settlement houses across the State, including in Albany, Buffalo, New York City, Rochester, Rockland County, Syracuse and Utica. The majority of these services are provided through UNH's membership of settlement houses. **The Legislature must invest \$8 million into the Settlement House Program in the FY 2026-2027 New York State Budget, to help settlement houses respond to the most urgent neighborhood needs and to account for a planned program expansion.**

The Settlement House Program is a crucial tool for settlement houses to shape their programming to meet neighborhood needs. Settlement houses are foundations of support for neighborhoods across the State, and local residents rely on them for a wide array of services including employment programs, food pantries, children's and afterschool programs, language and literacy education, legal counseling, eviction prevention, senior services, and mental health services. The Settlement House Program remains one of the few sources of person-centered and non-siloed government funding for settlement houses, allowing each one to go above and beyond to respond to the unique needs of its neighborhood.

Settlement houses are experts at pivoting services to support the most urgent needs in their neighborhoods, and today, settlement houses are responding to significant changes in access to federal benefits such as SNAP, while navigating higher rates of food and housing insecurity. The Settlement House Program allows settlement houses to go above and beyond to meet their unique neighborhood needs.

Some examples of how settlement houses are currently using Settlement House Program funds include:

- WHEDco uses the funding in the South Bronx to provide social workers in middle school programs to help address the high incidence of mental health needs that children are experiencing after a long pandemic; and more recently, WHEDco's social workers pivoted to meet emerging needs and trauma faced by migrant children in these programs.
- Syracuse Northeast Community Center in Central New York uses SHP funds to support their basic needs pantry that provides a full range of fresh foods and produce as well as personal care items. They have reported a significant uptick in pantry needs as more Syracuse families struggle to afford groceries.
- Trinity Alliance of the Capital Region uses the funds to focus on housing resources for low-income neighbors facing severe economic hardship, including those at-risk of eviction.
- The Chinese-American Planning Council uses this funding in New York City to offer support and trainings to older adults to help them stay in the workforce so they can have a greater level of financial stability in the midst of potential age discrimination at work, and provides regular wellness checks and benefits enrollment support to these older adults.

Thanks to the Legislature, in FY 2024-2025 the Settlement House Program received its first funding increase in over a decade, bringing the total value to \$4 million, a 60% increase over the previous year's value. This was a very positive development, and is enabling settlement houses to provide enhanced services to anyone who walks through their doors. Many settlement houses have reported using the increased funds to support their workforce through raises and retention bonuses, while some are also using the funds to expand services – for example, to provide more congregate meal service at senior centers, to cover vehicle maintenance to sustain a free neighborhood transportation service, and to expand hours for a housing services navigator.

At the same time, recent inflation demands and rising labor costs over the last decade have put additional strain on this small but powerful funding source. As families struggle with a deepening affordability crisis, additional funding will allow service levels to grow to better meet the needs of those who use settlement house services. Notably, the Settlement House Program was funded at a high of \$8.4 million in FY 2009-2010.

Settlement House Program grantees must comply with strict contracting rules set forth in a multi-year procurement process led by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), as well as provide consistent outcome reports throughout the contract period. The current five-year contract period will expire this year, on August 31, 2026, and OCFS's procurement process has ensured that more organizations will be added to the program¹ in the next round of contracts: ***this will result in less money per program if additional funds are not added.***

Even with these multi-year contracts, the Settlement House Program is fully funded by the Legislature each year, and this year's Executive Budget once again did not fund the Settlement House Program. We urgently need the Legislature's support to maintain and grow this essential program. **UNH urges the Legislature to fund the Settlement House Program at a total of \$8 million in the FY 2026-2027 Budget, to account for growth in the number of program grantees and to meet evolving community needs of New York's settlement houses.**

Organizations currently receiving Settlement House Program funds include:

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| ★ Arab American Family Support Center* | ★ New Settlement Apartments* |
| ★ Baden Street Settlement of Rochester | ★ Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation* |
| ★ Booker T. Washington Community Center | ★ Ocean Bay Community Development Corp* |
| ★ Broadway Housing Communities* | ★ Project Hospitality* |
| ★ Bronx House* | ★ Queens Community House* |
| ★ BronxWorks* | ★ Red Hook Initiative* |
| ★ Broome County Urban League | ★ Riverdale Neighborhood House* |
| ★ Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers | ★ SCAN-Harbor* |
| ★ CAMBA* | ★ School Settlement Association* |
| ★ Charles Settlement House | ★ Shorefront YM-YWHA of Brighton-Manhattan Beach* |
| ★ Chinese-American Planning Council* | ★ Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Centers* |
| ★ Claremont Neighborhood Center | ★ Southwest Area Neighborhood Association* |
| ★ Community Place of Greater Rochester | ★ Spanish Action League of Onondaga County |
| ★ Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation* | ★ St. Nicks Alliance* |
| ★ East Side House* | ★ Stanley M Isaacs Neighborhood Center* |
| ★ Educational Alliance* | ★ Sunnyside Community Services* |
| ★ Goddard Riverside Community Center* | ★ Syracuse Model Neighborhood Facility |
| ★ Grand Street Settlement* | ★ Syracuse Northeast Community Center* |
| ★ Greenwich House* | ★ The Neighborhood Center |
| ★ Hartley House* | ★ Trinity Alliance* |
| ★ Henry Street Settlement* | ★ Union Settlement* |
| ★ Hudson Guild* | ★ United Community Centers* |
| ★ Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement* | ★ University Settlement Society of New York* |
| ★ Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island | ★ Westcott Community Center* |
| ★ Kingsbridge Heights Community Center* | ★ Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDco)* |
| ★ Lenox Hill Neighborhood House* | |
| ★ Martin Luther King Multi-Purpose Center* | |
| ★ Mosholu Montefiore Community Center* | |

* UNH member

¹ OCFS has stated that all current grantees will continue to receive contracts if they are interested, and new organizations are also eligible to apply. These include some settlement houses that were not eligible to apply in the last round for technical reasons, and some that are not in UNH's network and were not previously aware of the funding stream.

Settlement House Workforce

The State relies on the nonprofit human services sector to run crucial programs for New Yorkers in an effective, culturally-sensitive, and safe manner. From early childhood education to homelessness prevention to case management for older adults, the provision of these services keeps New Yorkers healthy, thriving, and engaged in the civic and economic life of their communities. Unfortunately, nonprofit human service contracts are plagued with many challenges, including delayed payments, insufficient overhead, inadequate wages, and a lack of available capital funding to repair aging facilities. It is crucial that this budget include investments in nonprofit organizational health to keep the sector thriving and programs running. Most urgently this year, **the Budget must support the human services workforce by funding a 2.7% Targeted Inflationary Increase (TII, formerly known as a COLA), and ensure ALL human services workers can access the TII through provisions lined out in S.1580A (Persaud)/A.2590A (Hevesi).**

Human Service Workforce Challenges

Human service workers are grossly underpaid. An analysis by UNH found that human service workers face similar economic insecurity as the participants in their programs; in our report, [*The Need to Strengthen the Economic Security of the Settlement House Workforce*](#), we note that government funding decisions and chronic underinvestment in human services have led to poverty-level wages for essential frontline workers at settlement houses. Low wages, exacerbated by burnout from the COVID-19 pandemic, have resulted in chronically low staffing levels at human services organizations. Our settlement house members report more and longer vacancies, higher turnover, and significant challenges recruiting in a competitive labor market. A recent UNH survey of our members found that a third (33 percent) reported a double-digit increase in their average job vacancy rate over the past year (10 percent or higher).² Insufficient staffing has made it increasingly difficult for nonprofits to serve New Yorkers.

Fund a 2.7% Targeted Inflationary Increase

New York State has historically been statutorily required to provide annual cost of living increases (COLAs) to contracted human service workers – those that provide mental and behavioral health care, supportive housing, youth and child services, foster care, aging services, and a whole host of services for New Yorkers from all walks of life. With over 800,000 human service workers across the State, many of whom are women and people of color, the COLA is a critical mechanism to ensure that nonprofit providers have the necessary resources to keep up with the true cost of providing services and supports.

For many years, the COLA was deferred, contributing to an industry-wide staffing crisis that negatively affects providers' ability to provide essential community services. Governor Hochul rightfully broke that cycle of divestment and has funded cost of living increases for human services workers. This has been a very welcome development, and a step in the right direction to invest in this workforce and attract talent to this critical sector. Still, due to decades of divestment and cuts, the sector is in a remarkably fragile state. This inequitable system has forced nonprofits to operate with significantly less resources, and reduces the possibility of staff earning wages and benefits equivalent to comparable positions in either government or the private sector.

Recognizing this, **the sector has come together to collectively request that a 2.7% targeted inflationary increase (TII, formerly known as COLA) be included across the human services providers in the FY 26-27 Budget.** This investment will provide the necessary resources to improve and make meaningful

² 2024 UNH member salary survey. Based on a survey of 39 UNH members conducted from Dec. 2024 to Jan. 2024

progress in increasing wages for direct care and frontline workers' wages and to address inflationary increases related to benefits, maintenance, utilities, food, supplies, transportation, and insurance. A 2.7% investment, accounting for the growth in the Consumer Price Index this year, will be particularly impactful and alleviate the financial strain many have faced while working in the sector. The Governor proposed a 1.7% TII in this year's Executive Budget proposal, which is insufficient to meet the deep needs of the human services sector.

Include ALL Human Services Workers in the Targeted Inflationary Increase

In addition to providing a 2.7% investment, **the State must also ensure that the targeted inflationary increase is accessible to ALL human services workers.** Currently, the State's human services TII does not apply to every human services worker and program in New York State. TII (formerly known as COLA) language has remained relatively unchanged in the budget each year – stretching back to 2005 – and the programs listed out for each state agency do not include newer programs. Because of this, when the budget includes a human services TII, many human services workers across the State do not receive that increase and instead are held at poverty-level wages due to the State's inaction. This has made it challenging for settlement houses and other community-based nonprofit organizations to hire and retain qualified staff. It also creates challenges within multi-service agencies when some staff receive a TII, while others do not.

The State's TII statute must be amended to be inclusive of all State-contracted human services programs, including contracts held by DCJS, DOH, NYSED, NYSOFA, OASAS, OCFS, OMH, OPDV, OPWDD, OTDA, and OVS. Critical programs such as Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs), LEAPS afterschool, crime victim services, supportive housing, Adult Literacy Education (ALE), and rape crisis counselors are erroneously excluded from the TII and are essential to meet the human services needs of New York's adults, children, and families. A complete list of excluded programs can be found in legislation **S.1580A (Persaud)/A.2590A (Hesvi).** **This language must be included in the FY 26-27 Budget in the Health and Mental Hygiene bill part P.**

SNAP4All: Food for Excluded New Yorkers

UNH urges that Enacted Budget include a \$244 million investment to create a food benefit for New Yorkers who are ineligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) due solely to their immigration status, specifically focused on the 41,000 individuals who lost access to SNAP benefits under the federal spending bill House Resolution 1 (H.R.1) and 65,000 immigrant households with children per the recommendation of the NYS Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council.

New York's Food Insecurity Crisis and the Impact on Immigrant New Yorkers

New York State is experiencing exceptionally high rates of food insecurity, following years of hits to the state's food system that have exacerbated the growing affordability crisis for families across the state. Over the last five years, New Yorkers have faced a pandemic that posed unprecedented and lasting challenges to our food system, exorbitantly high rates of inflation, and now, federal changes to SNAP that are shifting new costs to the State, imposing new work requirements, and further restricting eligibility for certain immigrant groups.

In 2023, 14.5% of New Yorkers [reported](#) food insecurity—meaning they sometimes or often didn't have enough to eat—compared to 10.7% in 2019. And roughly 1 in 5 New York [children](#) (19%) were food insecure in 2023. Food insecurity falls disproportionately along racial lines: 26% of Hispanic New Yorkers, 25% of Black New Yorkers, and 9% of white New Yorkers reported food insecurity. Research

published in the [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#) reveals another stark disparity: noncitizens are nearly twice as likely to be food-insecure as U.S.-born and naturalized citizens. Food is a basic human right, and all New Yorkers deserve equal access to vital food assistance, regardless of their immigration status.

SNAP is the largest and most impactful anti-hunger program in the United States, providing nearly 3 million New Yorkers with an [average benefit](#) of \$6.89 per day in 2024. SNAP has been proven to not only enhance food security but also improve health outcomes, stimulate local economies, and reduce poverty.

Yet despite contributing over \$27 billion per year in state and local taxes, many immigrant New Yorkers are unjustly excluded from SNAP benefits. Lawfully present noncitizens, including Green Card holders and domestic violence victims, face an arbitrary five-year waiting period before accessing SNAP benefits. Other groups are excluded entirely, including those with Temporary Protected Status, DACA, and undocumented status, which together comprise as many as 673,000 New Yorkers.

With the passage of H.R. 1, signed into law in July 2025, SNAP eligibility restrictions for immigrants became even stricter. Refugees, asylees, and humanitarian parolees are now excluded from the program, leaving thousands of New Yorkers without access to SNAP benefits. Implementation [guidance](#) issued in October 2025 directed states to immediately deny new applications from New Yorkers in these groups and remove current recipients at recertification.

SNAP4All New York and FY26-27 Budget Proposal

Given this food insecurity crisis, SNAP4All New York proposes using state funds to provide a food benefit to all income-eligible households currently ineligible for SNAP solely due to their immigration status. In the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026-2027 Executive Budget, this program should begin its roll out by prioritizing two groups facing urgent food needs: 1) individuals who are newly ineligible for SNAP due to immigration status exclusions under H.R.1, and 2) households with children who are currently ineligible for SNAP due to their immigration status, as recommended in December 2024 by the New York State Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC).

Newly Excluded Immigrants

H.R. 1 stripped long-standing SNAP eligibility from refugees, asylees, humanitarian parolees, and others with longstanding humanitarian protections. This rollback will worsen food insecurity for thousands of immigrant New Yorkers, many of whom are fleeing situations of persecution, violence, human trafficking, climate disruption, and domestic violence. Given this emergency hunger crisis, the State must step up to prevent this change in eligibility from harming New Yorkers and their ability to afford food.

The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA)'s most recent estimate is that 41,000 New Yorkers will be affected by this change, though this number could change as the full impact becomes clearer. This part of the proposal will cost approximately \$103 million per year³ in benefits to recipients based on average SNAP benefit costs.

³ Note: This figure assumes full uptake of the program, which is not a guarantee, and does not include administrative costs for OTDA to operate the program.

Households with Children

The New York State Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC) in December 2024 [recommended](#) that New York State create a State food benefit for households with children who are ineligible for SNAP due to immigration status, as part of a pathway towards cutting child poverty by half by 2031. This crucial investment will ensure that New York families can put food on the table and that no child is left to face hunger.

According to the Urban Institute's modeling for CPRAC, establishing a State-funded food benefit for excluded families with children would reach nearly 65,000 New York households, providing each family with an average of \$2,169 in food assistance annually. CPRAC estimates that implementing this policy would cost up to \$141 million per year.

Cost and Impact

Investing \$244 million in a food benefit for excluded New Yorkers isn't just a policy choice—it's an economic stimulus. This \$244 million investment would generate 3,323 direct jobs in the food and beverage retail sector and an additional 2,367 jobs through indirect effects, bringing the total of additional jobs created to 5,690, strengthening both local economies and the families they serve.

A full SNAP4All policy would ultimately include more than just these two groups, providing a food benefit for all income-eligible New Yorkers. This program is laid out in **S.9033 (Rivera) / A.6632 (González-Rojas)**. As envisioned, this program would be run through the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) and provide benefit levels equal to the benefits provided for similarly situated SNAP-eligible households. The legislation requires a culturally-competent outreach plan to ensure strong uptake and regular reporting on the program's success. The legislation includes data privacy protections, and we encourage this program to include the strongest protections as possible to ensure benefit recipients are safe.

Momentum

There is growing momentum around the country for more equitable SNAP access. For example, in 2022, California expanded its state food assistance program to provide benefits for excluded Californians aged 55 and older. Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, and Washington have each implemented similar state-funded programs to provide food assistance for excluded immigrant households. Further, [110+ organizations](#) — including groups focused on health, food security, immigrant rights, and agriculture — have joined the SNAP4All New York Coalition, calling for a state-funded food benefit for all income-eligible households currently ineligible for SNAP due to citizenship status.

Settlement House Impact

Settlement houses in UNH's network are feeling the strain of our state's food insecurity crisis, with reports of growing pantry lines and people waiting for hours in the cold just to access food. Many of these individuals are unable to access other government food benefits due to their immigration status. At the same time, many are afraid to stand on pantry lines due to potential ICE raids, creating an untenable situation and an extreme hunger crisis. Settlement houses strongly support SNAP4All as an essential and timely way to help their neighbors.

New York State has a responsibility—and the necessary resources—to ensure that no New Yorker goes hungry, regardless of where they were born. At a time when the federal government is abandoning New York's immigrant families, New York State must step up as a champion for all its community

members—to ensure that immigrant New Yorkers can access the food they need to thrive. **Investing \$244 million in a food benefit for excluded New Yorkers in the FY 26-27 Budget will ensure every New Yorker has the food they urgently need.**

Early Childhood Education

Settlement houses began operating some of the first kindergarten programs in New York State in the early 20th century, and early childhood education programs remain an important component of serving their communities. Settlement Houses run approximately 75 child care programs of all modalities (contracted center based programs, contracted Family Child Care networks, Direct Head Start programs, and private pay), serving their communities with dedication and quality care. UNH represents its members interests and needs across several platforms, including through its active membership in the Empire State Campaign for Child Care.

The Governor’s FY 2026-2027 Executive Budget proposed additional funding for existing subsidies, like the Child Care Assistance Program, and new funding for a Universal Pre-K statewide expansion, support to the City of New York for 3-K and a new 2-Care NYC program, as well as the creation of child care pilot programs in select counties. Still, in order to make significant progress towards the creation of a high-quality, equitable, and universal child care system that meets the needs of all children and families, the State must go further and include strong supports for the workforce.

Child Care Workforce Compensation Fund

For the child care sector to thrive, and for its workforce to be financially stable, New York State must provide a deeper investment in its child care workforce. **We urge the State to invest \$1.2 billion in a permanent state child care workforce compensation fund**, which would make it robustly resourced and sufficient to offer all child care workers compensation parity with similar positions in the public school system.

Caring adults play a critical role in supporting children's social, emotional, and intellectual development. Child care centers want to retain staff committed to the children, families, and communities they serve. Still, much of the early childhood workforce at CBOs remain transient. In NYC, staff often depart for similar positions with NYC Public Schools (NYCPS), or pivot to higher-paying opportunities in other industries, often taking on entry-level roles. Furthermore, because of low wages among our State’s child care workforce, CBO center-based programs are left with staff shortages, preventing them from running at full capacity due to required children-adult ratios, which can be destabilizing to the development of young children who need continuity in order to thrive.

While for several years child care workers benefitted from pandemic-era federal funding supplements distributed through OCFS, last year these funds expired. The FY 26-27 Executive Budget allocated no funds for the child care workforce, therefore if nothing is added before the budget is finalized, there will be no funds for this essential workforce.

States across the country are confronting this fiscal cliff for their child care workforce, and creating their own funding streams to keep supporting and growing the workforce. New York State must act accordingly to continue stabilizing the sector and to boost the wages of these workers.

Without a firm commitment to paying child care educators family-sustaining wages, New York will continue to lose an even higher share of this workforce to higher-paying sectors or to their counterparts in the public school system. As parents struggle with long waiting lists and higher costs for tuition,

investing directly in the child care workforce will allow passionate educators to stay in these jobs and help New York build capacity to serve more families and a workforce pipeline for the future. UNH explores these issues in our policy brief, *A Critical Investment: Why New York Needs a Permanent Child Care Workforce Compensation Fund*.⁴

CCAP funding

To end the enrollment closures and waitlists for CCAP currently in place in more than 30 counties around the state, the State should **adopt the Governor's proposed \$1.2B recurring investment in New York's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), and add additional funding as needed to ensure no eligible families are turned away or placed on waitlists**

This funding must be ongoing, not one-time, because demand for CCAP is steadily growing. Counties must be assured the new level of funding will continue to be confident they can accept new CCAP families, and families must be able to rely on ongoing support to balance their family budgets. Further, the funds must be distributed to counties in an equitable manner, and without delay.

2-Care in New York City

New Yorkers United for Child Care and United Neighborhood Houses are co-leading the 2-Care campaign, the effort to age down New York City's universal PreK and 3K systems to reach 2-year-olds and put us on a path toward universal, free, non-means-tested child care for all. In January, Governor Hochul, in partnership with Mayor Mamdani, committed to fully fund the first two years of the city's implementation, and the Executive Budget included \$73 million to begin a contract-based child care program for two-year olds. The first year of the program will focus on high-need areas selected by New York City and is expected to enroll 2,000 children. When fully implemented, 2-Care is anticipated to serve 30,000 kids. We urge the Legislature to join the Governor and the City in supporting this investment and taking an important step toward universal, accessible child care for all New Yorkers.

Afterschool Programs

Afterschool programs are a place where youth can participate in activities that contribute to their social-emotional development, while being outside a classroom and in a safe, supervised environment. Afterschool also acts as a crucial support for working families to ensure they have safe, reliable, and affordable child care for school-aged children. To address growing concerns around affordability and support the full continuum of childcare, **the State must expand investments in afterschool by funding \$155 million for all eligible proposals, and \$25 million to restore afterschool access for middle and high school students.**

The Executive Budget proposes \$116.06 million in funding for the LEAPS afterschool program, an increase of \$6 million over last year's Enacted Budget, allowing for minimum wage increases for program staff. However, the demand for afterschool in New York State persists - with over 1.3 million children whose parents want to enroll them in a program but cannot. While the State has made encouraging investments and taken notable steps to streamline the system, including the consolidation of Advantage and Empire, approximately 48,000 children lost programming from the reallocation of program slots. This [map](https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/GdE4v/15/) shows lost slots by county (<https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/GdE4v/15/>). Although Albany and Fulton County, and some counties in Western NY and the Finger Lakes, saw moderate increases to the local afterschool system, New York City and other city centers saw dramatic

⁴https://assets.nationbuilder.com/unhny/pages/1134/attachments/original/1738029341/A_Critical_Investment_-_Why_New_York_Needs_a_Permanent_Child_Care_Workforce_Compensation_Fund.pdf?1738029341

reductions in funded programming. In fact, Bronx, Dutchess, Monroe, Nassau, Queens, Suffolk, and Westchester counties all lost over 1,000 program slots, with the Bronx losing over 3,000 slots. Each slot lost represents a young person who no longer has access to state-funded afterschool programming. We commend the expansion of programming upstate as we know these regions have long been starved of sufficient youth funding. However, the dramatic loss of after-school programming in other regions has resulted in an unmet need and an untapped opportunity.

With additional funding in this year's budget, providers with eligible proposals, many of whom previously operated state-funded afterschool, would be able to reestablish programming and continue supporting our children and families. In order to meet the increased need for high-quality after-school programming, **the FY 2026-2027 Enacted Budget should fund all LEAPS proposals that received the "approved but not funded" designation during the recent procurement.** We estimate that this will cost \$155 million to fill the gap statewide. To give an example of the impact this funding could have, funding an additional \$23.6 million of approved but not funded proposals in the settlement house network, would result in an additional 8,000 children receiving after-school programming.

The State can prioritize additional afterschool funding by aligning it with the recently announced child care pilots, establishing a true continuum of care for New York's children and families. We ask state leaders to add universal afterschool to the county pilots for universal child care— Broome, Dutchess, and Monroe— which have lost 369, 1,440, and 1,166 afterschool slots, respectively, since the creation of LEAPS. An expansion of both child care and PreK cannot succeed without parallel investments in afterschool and expanded learning opportunities. We must not destabilize the system, but instead raise all boats. We would also note that LEAPS funding can, in fact, be used for programming for four-year-olds—another way to connect these programs.

In addition to the reorganization of afterschool slots, LEAPS also excluded children aged 13 who were previously served under earlier state afterschool investments. Instead, the State made a limited investment in a new pilot program, BOOST (Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time).

While we appreciate the intent behind BOOST, the scale of unmet need for youth ages 13 to 17 far exceeds the program's current capacity. BOOST serves only the highest-risk older youth and excludes New York City, except for specialized high schools. This leaves tens of thousands of middle and high school students without access to safe, enriching afterschool opportunities during a critical developmental period. **The FY 2026-2027 Enacted Budget should invest \$25 million to restore afterschool access for middle and high school students who were excluded from LEAPS funding.**

Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs)

NORCs are housing developments or neighborhoods that were not originally designed as senior housing but have naturally become home to a significant number of older adults over time. NORCs receive contracts to coordinate support from housing, social services, and health care providers to promote the health and stability of older adults living in apartment buildings and housing complexes, as well as in slightly lower-density neighborhoods and rural areas (Neighborhood NORCs or NNORCs).⁵ **UNH strongly supports Governor Hochul's Executive Budget proposal to increase funding for the NORC program by an additional \$4 million for NORCs and \$4 million for Neighborhood NORCs, which will expand the number of NORCs throughout the State and strengthen overall program sustainability. Additionally, the FY 2026-2027 Budget must invest an additional \$1 million for nursing supports in NORCs.**

⁵ Throughout this testimony "NORC" refers to both Classic NORC and Neighborhood NORC programs.

The NORC program is currently funded at a base of \$8.055 million, which is split between two budget lines for NORCs and Neighborhood NORCs; along with a \$1 million Legislative addition in FY 25-26. This supports 43 NORCs throughout the State that are contracted by the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA). We are grateful to Governor Hochul for recognizing the vast success of NORCs over the past 30 years in helping older adults to age in place and investing in NORCs to support critical services they provide to older adults. The Executive Budget included a significant investment in NORCs, representing a doubling of the base funding to \$16.055 million total. This funding is essential to support and expand this impactful program. We also recognize that the Legislature has been a tremendous champion for this program over many years, and we respectfully request additional continued support for NORC nursing services.

The Need to Invest in NORCs

The number of older adults in our State is growing rapidly: there are now nearly 5 million older adult New Yorkers, up 25 percent from about 4 million roughly a decade ago, according to 2023 American Community Survey Census data. By 2030, the number of older New Yorkers is expected to reach 5.3 million.⁶ In addition, as the State's population ages, a growing number of older adults are living alone, particularly those with the lowest incomes—ACS data shows that 53 percent of poor older adult New York State residents live alone, in contrast to just 15 percent of higher-income older adult New Yorkers.

At the same time, older adults overwhelmingly prefer to age in place at home—a 2021 AARP survey found that 77 percent of adults 50 and older want to remain in their homes for the long term.⁷ Research has also shown that in addition to preventing social isolation, allowing older adults to age in place in their communities has notable health benefits. Civic engagement and volunteering can increase physical function and levels of self-rated health; reduce symptoms of depression and pain; and increase life expectancy.⁸ N/NORCs are a key support system to promote aging in place, and will help meet the needs of this growing population in a fiscally responsible way.

N/NORCs are incredibly cost effective for the State as compared to alternatives. In New York, a private room in a nursing home can cost nearly \$159,000 a year, according to Genworth's 2021 Cost of Care Survey. Meanwhile, NYSOFA estimates the average cost of serving an older adult in a New York State N/NORC program is just \$480 a year. By offering health and social services close to home, N/NORCs can delay institutionalization and reduce the need for hospitalization, emergency department visits, and observation status, generating sizable cost-savings for both older adults and taxpayers. As an example, in a 2012 publication, UJA-Federation of New York estimated that the NORC Program at Penn South Houses forestalled 460 hospital and 317 nursing home stays, saving over \$10 million for residents and taxpayers at that time.⁹

Further, given that older adults participating in NORC programs have better access to necessary nursing and health care services, they are more likely than the general older adult population to be immunized and to utilize preventative care services. A survey of more than 5,000 older adults participating in NORC programs in New York City found that this population had higher rates of flu immunization (77 percent) and pneumonia vaccination (58 percent) than older adults citywide (57 and

⁶ <https://www.ny.gov/programs/new-york-states-master-plan-aging>

⁷ <https://www.aarp.org/home-family/your-home/info-2021/home-and-community-preferences-survey.html>

⁸ <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/fall13/highlight2.html>

⁹ Guo, Kristina L., and Richard J. Castillo. "The US long term care system: Development and expansion of naturally occurring retirement communities as an innovative model for aging in place." *Ageing International* 37 (2012): 210-227.

48 percent, respectively). That survey also found that older adults in a NORC program were more likely to receive mammograms and colonoscopies.¹⁰

Pro-Bono Nursing Challenges

Despite their outstanding work to support older adults, NORCs face a specific funding challenge. Many programs struggle to meet requirements for on-site nursing hours, which are mandated in NYSOFA contracts in the healthcare management and healthcare assistance and monitoring categories. The vast majority of NORCs fill these requirements with nurses. In alignment with the NORC model, these nurses provide vital services that would not otherwise exist in the community, such as medication education, diabetes testing, flu shots, mobility and balance screenings, and doctor-patient connections. Many residents rely on these nurses as a main source of health care and truly value the consistent, quality care they provide. While no two programs are identical, the average NORC program utilizes 22 nurse hours per week.¹¹

At many NORC sites, providers have traditionally secured pro-bono nursing services sourced from hospitals, students, retired volunteers, and other means. These in-kind nursing services maintain the NORC program's founding principle of community-based partnerships and supports. However, these arrangements have become unstable due to changes in the healthcare field, in addition to the growing need for health care as New York's population ages. Further, in 2019 the largest provider of nursing services to NORCs eliminated all of their pro-bono hours. From 2015-2018, NORC programs reported an average loss of 50% of their pro bono hours, from about 12 to 6 hours each week. Consequently, NORC contracts do not fully fund the services required by NYSOFA. In effect, nursing hours represent an unfunded, though important, mandate in NYSOFA contracts.

UNH is grateful to the Legislature for all of its attention and support for the NORC program over the last several years. For the last several budget cycles the Legislature has provided additional funding specifically to support healthcare and nursing services in NORCs. This supplemental nursing funding was first added by the Legislature in FY 2019-2020, and has been added by the Legislature each year since then at \$1 million. Each NORC receives \$23,256 each year in their contracts from that \$1 million in nursing funding. Unfortunately, the largest provider of NORC nursing services recently increased their rates once again, meaning rates have risen by 18% since the Legislature began providing these supplemental funds. **We urge the Legislature to once again include an additional \$1 million for nursing supports.**

NORC Expansion

The NORC program last underwent an expansion in 2019, and at that time there were more applicants to the program than the State could afford to fund. Further, according to an analysis in UNH's recent report, *NORCs: An Antidote to Social Isolation*,¹² many of the counties in New York State that have seen the largest increases in their older adult populations over the last decade lack NORC programs, including counties in the Hudson Valley and Central New York. In addition, in 2023 the Legislature passed legislation (S.3392 (May)/A.5915 (Kim)) that expands Neighborhood NORC eligibility to buildings that are taller than six stories, closing a loophole that impacted applications in the past and

¹⁰ Vladeck, Fredda, Rebecca Segel, Mia Oberlink, Michal D. Gursen, and Danylle Rudin. "Health Indicators: A Proactive and Systematic Approach to Healthy Aging." *Cityscape* 12, no. 2 (2010): 67–84.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20868745>.

¹¹ According to a survey of NORC Program Directors completed in November 2018 – note all additional data in this section was compiled from this survey.

¹²http://assets.nationbuilder.com/unhny/pages/12/attachments/original/1711044936/UNH_NORCs_Report.pdf?1711044936

will grant future eligibility to more sites. This update is especially relevant for upstate cities, where certain buildings have expressed interest in becoming NORCs or Neighborhood NORCs in the past but were ineligible.

With the Executive Budget's proposed new investment this year, NYSOFA will be able to create numerous new NORC programs across the State, which will serve hundreds if not thousands of older adults.

The State's Master Plan for Aging seeks to "ensure older New Yorkers can live fulfilling lives, in good health, with freedom, dignity and independence to age in place for as long as possible," and notes that "older adults...should be able to choose to remain in their communities." NORCs are tailor-made to fit that vision, and the State must dedicate resources to bolstering this program. **We strongly urge the Legislature to accept the Executive Budget's \$8 million increase to NORCs and add an additional \$1 million to support nursing services in N/NORCs.**

Supporting Immigrant Families

Many of New York's settlement houses started during the last significant wave of migration to New York in the late 1800s, and the work of helping individuals and families successfully settle in New York has never ceased, but merely changed and adapted with the times. Today, the new federal administration is targeting immigrants across our country, following through on the President's commitment to mass deportation. Settlement houses are rapidly sharing resources so community members know their legal rights, and several offer direct legal services. This year's budget must not ignore this destructive reality and provide funding to support immigrant families in New York.

We urge the Legislature to include \$175 million for immigration legal services in the FY 26-27 budget and to pass the Access to Representation Act this session.

Legal services and Access to Representation

Immigrant New Yorkers across the state are facing an unprecedented escalation in detention and deportation driven by federal policies. Families are being separated, long-time residents are being swept into the immigration system, and many are forced to navigate complex legal proceedings without counsel. When people face deportation without legal representation, the risk of wrongful detention and removal increases dramatically, undermining due process and basic fairness.

The Access to Representation Act would make New York the first state in the nation to guarantee the right to counsel for immigrants facing deportation. This would ensure that individuals have a meaningful opportunity to present their case and protect their families and livelihoods.

A **\$175 million investment in immigration legal services** is essential to meeting the current level of need and ensuring that no New Yorker is forced to face the immigration legal system alone. At a moment when federal actions are eroding due process protections, New York has both the responsibility and the opportunity to lead by making concrete investments that uphold fairness, dignity, and justice.

Adult Literacy Education (ALE)

In New York State, 3.9 million adults have limited English proficiency or do not have a high school diploma, yet the total state investment in adult literacy education covers classes for less than 3 percent

of the population in need. Investing in adult literacy education yields proven benefits for individuals and communities, contributing to better health, safety, employment and wages, economic stability, civic participation, and education outcomes for the children of adult learners. This year, **the State must invest \$15 million in Adult Literacy Education to expand opportunities and support for New Yorkers who are working hard to build their skills and sustain their families.**

Currently funded at \$9.8 million, New York State's Adult Literacy Education (ALE) program supports trusted community-based nonprofits to deliver Adult Basic Education, High School Equivalency, and English classes and support services to more than 6,600 New Yorkers across the state. ALE funding flows through the New York State Education Department and is the only state funding stream that is available to community-based organizations, community colleges, public libraries and literacy volunteer programs and is flexible enough to serve individuals with a range of levels, experiences, and goals.

Funding for adult education flows to NYSED through three main funding streams: ALE, Employment Preparation Education (EPE), and Title II of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). State funding for the 2025 ALE Request for Proposals was insufficient to meet the needs of adult literacy learners across the state. Many high performing programs, especially in New York City, did not receive continued funding and had to terminate in-demand classes and interrupt student learning. Increased funds are needed to allow providers on the NYSED ALE eligible-but-not-awarded list to restart their classes, and to expand support to additional providers.

Federal funding for adult education is also at risk. The Trump administration has proposed eliminating all funding for the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (WIOA Title II), which would result in a \$47 million loss for New York State across 78 providers – community-based organizations, libraries, community colleges, BOCES, and school districts. The administration's reinterpretation of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) could also result in adult community members losing access to basic education classes. We must protect and expand state funding to provide education to New Yorkers regardless of immigration status and workforce outcomes that are mandated in other state- and federally-funded adult education programs.

To help New Yorkers succeed, the State must increase the total funding for Adult Literacy Education (ALE) from \$9.8 million to \$15 million. This will support community-based adult education programs to serve an additional 3,500 students in FY27, bringing the ALE total to over 10,000 students.

The FY 26-27 Executive Budget allocated only \$9.3 million of the \$9.8 million in FY 25-26, representing a \$500,000 cut in ALE funding. New York must support the academic goals of the 6,600 students who are currently being served through the Adult Literacy Education program and expand services to 3,500 more adults in need of educational opportunities.

All New Yorkers should have the chance to gain foundational literacy skills. Community-based education programs need more support to provide high quality services to the growing number of adults who need them and to sustain these opportunities. We urge the New York State Legislature to invest \$15 million in Adult Literacy Education to expand opportunities and support for New Yorkers who are working hard to build their skills and sustain their families.

SNAP Skimming

Over the last several years, SNAP skimming has emerged as a top challenge facing low-income New Yorkers. UNH's settlement house members have increasingly raised concerns that this is persistently occurring in communities, especially for older adults and those who rely on EBT card benefits to feed

their families, and there is little recourse to address the problem. **UNH strongly supports Governor Hochul's Executive Budget proposal to transition to EBT chip card technology to address SNAP skimming, and further supports a \$20 million investment to create a SNAP skimming victims compensation fund to support New Yorkers who have had their benefits stolen.**

Skimming is the practice of individuals using devices and attaching them to point-of-sale (POS) machines or PIN pads to steal card numbers and other information from credit, debit, and EBT cards. The process of skimming retrieves data from the magnetic strip on an individual's card, which is then used to record the cardholder's PIN.

This has had a devastating impact on families such as skipping meals until the next grocery pay period, and leaving them without funds to buy essential groceries and other necessities. Skimming exacerbates food insecurity and financial stress for already vulnerable households, making it harder for them to meet their basic needs and maintain stability.

The scope of the problem in New York is stunningly large: The USDA reports that New Yorkers have received almost \$51 million in replacement SNAP benefits between 2023 and the end of 2024.¹³ The cost of this problem is likely even higher, since many families do not report the crimes. In a recent Propel survey of New York State SNAP recipients, over 2,500 of the almost 12,000 survey respondents reported having their SNAP benefits stolen within the past year.¹⁴ Nearly 40 percent of theft victims did not file for reimbursement, with the majority reporting that they weren't aware refunds were an option. The cost of this problem is likely higher, since many families do not report the crimes. With fewer recipients reporting skimming thefts due to the federal government no longer providing compensation funds, it is nearly impossible for the State to have an accurate grasp on the amount of funds being skimmed.

UNH has been urging Governor Hochul to transition EBT cards with more secure chip card technology and we are grateful for the inclusion of chip cards in her Executive Budget Proposal. According to Visa, EMV chip cards decreased fraud by 87 percent from 2015-2019 because they have higher amounts of encryption technology on the chip. Several states have taken action to replace the cards on their own, including California, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Oklahoma. We are grateful that New York will be the next state to make this simple and impactful change.

UNH continues to advocate for the **State to establish a compensation fund of approximately \$20 million so those who have had their benefits stolen can receive replacement funds until the chip cards can be implemented**, as the federal government was providing until December 2024. Many families and individuals benefitted from the federal government providing replacement funds, but now there is no recourse if someone has their benefits stolen. The absence of reimbursement funds means if someone has their benefits stolen, they cannot afford to purchase food. People may turn to food pantries, though these options are limited as emergency food demand has been rising. Many people are certainly going hungry due to this crime of skimming.

It is essential for lawmakers to support New Yorkers who have had their SNAP benefits stolen by replacing the funds as soon as a claim is filed and quickly substantiated. Ideally funding would come from the federal government, given that initial funds are from that source, but in today's political climate that is extremely unlikely to occur, and as such the State should look into absorbing some of those costs to immediately assist families in need.

¹³ [SNAP Replacement of Stolen Benefits Dashboard](#)

¹⁴ [2025 Propel survey of EBT theft awareness and impact: State supplement](#)

Addressing Food Insecurity

Food insecurity emerged as a top community need at settlement houses during the pandemic, and today, demand for emergency food remains at higher levels than before the pandemic began, with families who are grappling with meeting their basic needs as our state navigates an affordability crisis. Settlement houses address hunger through benefits enrollment, pantry services, community outreach, and referrals. Still, resources and government support remain sparse. Food is a basic human right and all New Yorkers deserve equal access to vital food assistance.

This year's budget must protect, invest in, and expand New Yorkers' access to SNAP and other critical anti-hunger programs. We support Executive Budget proposals to transition to EBT chip cards, increase funding for emergency food programs, and expand access to summer nutrition programs—but more is needed to respond to the food security crisis at hand. The Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP), New York's network of SNAP navigators, will play a critical role in helping New Yorkers access and maintain SNAP benefits amid federal policy changes, but without additional state investment to backfill federal cuts, many communities will lose SNAP navigators when they are needed most. We urge the Legislature to fund NOEP at \$8.5M to sustain access to SNAP navigators statewide. New York can also build on successful programs, including by increasing the minimum SNAP benefit, extending food benefits to families who are excluded from SNAP solely due to immigration status (as noted above in the "SNAP4All" section), and expanding Nourish New York, HPNAP, and NOEP. Together, these investments will support food security, health, and affordability for New Yorkers.

NOEP

The Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) is New York's statewide network of more than 80 community-based SNAP navigators who help connect potentially eligible families to SNAP through outreach, prescreenings, and application assistance. Several settlement houses serve as these community navigator hubs. By increasing SNAP participation, NOEP also helps more low-income New Yorkers qualify for other interconnected programs, including WIC, Summer EBT, and free school meals. Last year, NOEP provided SNAP information to more than 158,000 New Yorkers and helped more than 30,000 families successfully enroll in SNAP. NOEP generates an estimated 25 to 1 return on investment for New York, as it draws down additional federally funded food benefits into local economies.

SNAP navigators are especially important amid the rollout of complex federal changes to SNAP eligibility, work reporting requirements, and budgeting rules. However, NOEP—which is funded through a combination of state and federal funds—will lose *half* of its federal funding due to cuts in H.R. 1. Without additional state investment, NOEP will be forced to scale back SNAP navigators when New Yorkers need them most.

To ensure New Yorkers have continued access to SNAP navigators, we ask the Legislature to fund NOEP at \$8.5 million, a \$4.798 legislative add-on to the Executive Budget proposal.

HPNAP

The Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) is an incredibly impactful program that addresses New Yorkers' ongoing hunger needs. The program provides funding for high-quality food that is distributed to approximately 2,500 Emergency Food Relief Organizations in New York State, including food banks, pantries, soup kitchens and emergency shelters. In each of the last three budgets, the Legislature has invested over \$22 million in additional funding for HPNAP. This funding enables food banks to distribute an extra 30 million pounds of food, while helping nonprofits afford the higher costs of food and transportation. This year's Executive Budget absorbed the Legislative addition and

raised the program up to \$72.8 million. Given rising prices and increased demand at emergency food providers, the State should increase HPNAP funding for a total of \$75 million.

Nourish New York

Nourish New York enables food providers to purchase directly from New York-based farmers and producers, increasing access to nutritious, locally sourced food. It has been a valuable source of funding for NYS farmers and producers to get fresh, local food into the emergency food system and fuel local economies. This year's Executive Budget included a total of \$55 million for the program. The State should increase its investment in this program \$75 million – a \$20 million increase – to keep up with demand.

SNAP Minimum Benefit

SNAP is the largest and most impactful anti-hunger program in the United States, providing benefits to nearly 3 million New Yorkers. SNAP has been proven to not only enhance food security but also improve health outcomes, stimulate local economies, and reduce poverty. The Office of the New York State Comptroller reported that in January 2025, nearly 3 million New Yorkers received \$655.9 million of SNAP benefits for the month and approximately \$7.35 billion total benefits. SNAP has been proven to enhance food security, improve health outcomes, and lift people out of poverty. It also stimulates the economy: the USDA estimates that every \$1 paid out in SNAP benefits generates \$1.50 in economic activity.¹⁵

Unfortunately, New Yorkers saw a significant drop in their benefits in 2023 following the end of SNAP Emergency Allotments: households saw an average loss of \$151 per month, while some saw their monthly benefits drop to just \$23. It is simply impossible to afford a month of groceries, let alone a day or two of food, with just \$23. Low benefit amounts are often cited as a barrier to SNAP participation, suggesting that a more adequate minimum benefit could draw down more federal dollars. With food insecurity on the rise and federal SNAP funding at increasing risk, **we urge the State to support an adequate minimum SNAP benefit of at least \$100 per month, through a \$100 million State investment.** Over 107,000 New Yorkers would benefit from this initiative. Legislation on this issue has been introduced by Senator May (S.665) and Assemblymember González-Rojas (A.1318). Further, 66% of registered NY voters supported increasing SNAP minimum benefits to \$100 a month, according to a November 2023 Siena College poll. New Jersey and New Mexico have implemented similar State-funded SNAP supplements.

Housing Access Voucher Program

The Housing Access Voucher Program is currently a four-year pilot program that provides rental assistance to individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to secure permanent housing and transition out of shelters or unsustainable housing situations. It was funded with a \$50 million investment in the FY 2025-2026 Enacted Budget. UNH urges the Governor to **increase the Housing Access Voucher Program budget to \$250 million and make the program permanent.**

Settlement houses across New York State reported housing insecurity to be one of the most urgent and rapidly worsening challenges. Following the eviction moratorium implemented early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, active eviction cases have continued to rise to this day. As federal pandemic-era aid and

¹⁵ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=93528>

eviction protections have fully lapsed, community-based organizations continue to see increasing needs in eviction prevention services due to rising housing instability. There are over 158,000 New Yorkers without a home¹⁶ and over 175,000 active eviction cases¹⁷ across New York State.

Housing vouchers are a cost-effective method in combatting the homelessness crisis, but are inaccessible to the majority of New Yorkers. The Housing Access Voucher Program is significantly more accessible than other existing voucher programs because it would be available to undocumented New Yorkers, New Yorkers with prior felony convictions, and New Yorkers with no income, none of whom are currently eligible for local or federal rental assistance programs.¹⁸ A \$250 million investment would provide stability for approximately 20,000 households, preventing evictions, reducing pressure on the shelter system, and helping families remain housed.¹⁹

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. We are happy to answer any questions and can be reached by emailing Tara Klein at tklein@unhny.org.

¹⁶ [DiNapoli: Numbers of Homeless Population Doubled in New York](#)

¹⁷ [NYS Eviction Crisis Monitor](#)

¹⁸ [What is the Housing Access Voucher Program?](#)

¹⁹ [Sen. Kavanagh, AM Rosenthal, Lawmakers, and Advocates Call for \\$250 Million in State Budget for the Housing Access Voucher Program](#)