

# STATE

OF THE STATE

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**OUR NEW YORK, OUR FUTURE**  
GOVERNOR KATHY HOCHUL

*The Constitution of New York State requires the Governor to deliver an annual message to the Legislature regarding the state of the state.*

*The State of the State proposals are the first step in defining the Governor's agenda in 2024.*

*Additional policies and funding details will be included in the upcoming Governor's Executive Budget.*

## FOREWORD

My fellow New Yorkers,

The 204 proposals in this book reflect our plan for the year ahead and the 20 million hard-working New Yorkers we are privileged to represent.

I've listened as they've told me about the challenges they face and the dreams they hold, and it's with them in mind that I proudly share my vision for 2024.

The State of New York is strong – stronger today than when I became Governor two years ago. Healthier. Safer. More affordable.

We've traversed rocky terrain, but there are still switchbacks before the summit. Across our state and our nation people worry that a safe and affordable life is unattainable.

While shootings and murders have declined by double digits, people are still concerned about safety at the grocery store, the synagogue, or on the subway. Although we've made great strides to take guns off our streets, too many parents are fearful as their children get on the school bus each morning.

Mental health is also a serious issue. Troubled individuals commit violent acts, and too often we learn they fell through the cracks after being discharged from a hospital.

And New Yorkers are also contending with the rising cost of living. Inflation is down from 9.1% to 3.1% over the last eighteen months, and paychecks are finally growing, but many of our neighbors struggle to make a dollar stretch. They feel that no matter how hard they work, they'll never be as successful as their parents, and won't be able to build lives in the communities they grew up in.

This is why I fight every day to give New Yorkers a better shot at a better life.

Since taking office, I've worked with the legislature to help create more than 600,000 jobs and reduced unemployment from 7.4% to 4% while holding the line on taxes across the board and cutting them for the middle class.

We boosted K-12 education by \$5.3 billion - an 18% increase - and fully funded foundation aid for the first time in state history. We invested a record \$7 billion in childcare and gave \$1.3 billion in raises for home health aides and bonuses for healthcare workers.

We saved the MTA from a looming fiscal cliff that threatened the economy of the entire region and nearly doubled ridership over the past two years, up nearly 30 million riders.

No prior administration or legislature has invested more in our roads, bridges, and public infrastructure to rebuild our State, and we've worked hard to restore trust and integrity in Government.

New Yorkers need to know we will continue to have their backs, keep fighting the right battles on their behalf, and relentlessly pursue common sense ideas that lift all residents of this great state.

With this perspective, my fellow New Yorkers - we've got work to do.

My first day as Governor, I quoted Teddy Roosevelt. I promised to always "strive valiantly" on behalf of New Yorkers, and to be that woman in the arena.

How do I intend to keep that promise in the coming year? By taking on persistent crime, like retail theft, hate crimes, and domestic violence. By revolutionizing our mental health infrastructure so people can actually get the help they need. And by protecting your hard-earned money from bad actors and predatory lenders, and from politicians who want to raise your taxes.

We will usher in an era of prosperity and growth and we will continue to build a New York that welcomes all businesses: new and existing, small and large, family-owned and publicly traded.

Just look at what Micron's historic \$100 billion investment is doing for Central New York - we're bringing in 50,000 jobs and boosting the entire local economy, from high paying tech jobs to construction jobs to the restaurants and small businesses that will flourish as a result.

We'll keep driving transformative infrastructure and public transit projects like the 2nd Avenue Subway Extension, Interborough Express, and I-81 Viaduct, creating thousands of good-paying union jobs along the way.

As we embark on the task of laying out a blueprint of priorities for this year and beyond, judge us by whom we are fighting for.

We fight for minimum wage workers, because no one should labor 40 hours a week and live below the poverty line. We fight for farmers threatened by extreme weather and workforce shortages.

We fight for seniors making ends meet on a fixed income. We fight for women balancing motherhood and careers. And we fight for children just beginning their journey in life. In so doing, we must pursue the common good with common sense by seeking common ground.

As we uphold these commitments, we won't spend money we don't have. Every state relied upon pandemic funds from Washington that have dried up, and it's on us, as responsible adults, to make the hard yet necessary decisions to use taxpayer dollars creatively and responsibly.

Working together, we will provide a better life to New Yorkers, with a commonsense agenda focused on fighting crime, fixing our mental health system, and protecting New Yorkers' hard earned money.

New Yorkers have heard promises before, and it's easy to become cynical or feel overwhelmed by the swirl of chaos in our news feeds. The war in Israel and Gaza, white supremacists attacking our churches and schools, the latest theft at the grocery store and the stack of bills on the kitchen counter.

New Yorkers look at their bank accounts wondering how they'll pay the rent or afford the insulin their child needs to survive. Those nights of worry can be so long and so dark.

In those moments, I understand why some people feel that the sun is setting on the Empire State. But I don't despair.

I see light on the horizon. This is a state where resiliency runs in our blood. No mountain is too steep to summit.

Our strength is forged from the diversity and industry of our people. We succeed because of our contrasts, our differences. We are more powerful together than we are on our own.

It's both fascinating and improbable that our great state could be home to the world's leading financial institutions and the locally-owned Mom and Pop shops that dot the Main Streets of charming upstate villages.

Home to the creative minds that bring song and dance to Broadway and action to our screens; the steely backs of our proud manufacturing workers who make products sold the world over; the deft hands of our most gifted surgeons fighting cancer and saving lives; the strong shoulders of our hardworking farmers cultivating their fields, herds and flocks to feed our State; the nurturing spirit of our childcare providers and teachers who look after our children; and the bodega owners making the most delicious bacon, egg and cheese with a greeting and a smile.

As Taylor Swift reminds us, everybody here "was someone else before." And although people might live fundamentally different lives, they still stand side-by-side on the subway platform, united as New Yorkers.

We all want to see our great state succeed, and that means lending a hand to those who need us most. As my predecessor, Franklin Delano Roosevelt said: "The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little."

And that's why our policies must lift more people into the middle class and give them the same opportunities my immigrant grandparents had. We don't want a New York with a gulf between the rich and the poor. We want to build a bridge to the middle class and beyond.

Today, I've told you how we'll build that bridge in 2024. We're enacting a vision of New York where veterans embark upon incredible careers fighting the climate crisis with green energy and offshore wind; where unions are strong and our infrastructure is resilient, able to withstand hundred-year storms; where firefighters, police officers and nurses can afford homes and raise their families in the communities they grew up in; where children learn to read and swim; where people with disabilities are free to pursue their dreams; where our LGBTQ neighbors are free to be their true selves; and where women know that I will always fiercely protect their right to an abortion, fair wages, and freedom from domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment.

We'll never compromise our progressive values as New Yorkers. Our New York is as powerful as Niagara Falls and shines as brightly as the Montauk Point lighthouse. We stand as resolute as Lady Liberty, and our compassion runs as deep as glacier-carved Seneca Lake.

In our state, we stand by New Yorkers on their darkest days, and we empower all people to live their lives with optimism and hope.

This is *our* New York and this is *our* future. And if we as leaders fulfill our commitments and our promises, this is the dawn of a new day. The sun truly is rising on New York.

**Governor Kathy Hochul**

*January 2024*

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## **SECTION I: TACKLING THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS**

In 2023, Governor Hochul made a historic, \$1 billion commitment to improving mental health, aimed at reversing decades of disinvestment and rebuilding New York's continuum of care. Last year's budget included significant, strategic investments – in psychiatric beds, supportive housing, community-based supports, and more – to create the necessary infrastructure to make New York the national leader in mental health, and to begin to get New Yorkers the care they deserve and that has too long been denied.

These investments represented an enormous leap forward for mental health care in New York and a new policy regime – one responsive to the scope of the crisis after years of neglect. Under Governor Hochul's leadership, these commitments are already bearing fruit, and new services are becoming available to New Yorkers each month.

Last year, Governor Hochul put plans in motion to:

- Increase operational capacity for inpatient psychiatric treatment by creating 150 new State-operated beds and bringing 850 Article 28 hospital beds back online;
- Address gaps in the hospital admission and discharge planning process with joint guidance from the Office of Mental Health and Department of Health;
- Dramatically expand outpatient and community-based programs, with funding for new Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs), community-based Assertive Community Treatment teams (ACT), Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Programs (CPEPs), Critical Time Intervention (CTI) teams, and Safe Options Supports (SOS) teams, among other initiatives;
- Create 3,500 new units of housing for individuals with mental illness, including 500 Community Residence-Single Room Occupancy (CR-SRO) units, 900 transitional step-down units, 600 Licensed Apartment units, and 1,500 Supportive Housing units;

- Expand mental health services for children and youth, including an expansion of school-based mental health clinics, home-based crisis intervention teams, and investments in other critical services; and
- Expand insurance coverage for mental health and substance use disorder services, including requiring commercial insurance plans to cover school-based mental health services for kids in the school the child attends and to reimburse them fairly.

This year, Governor Hochul will build on her commitment to tackling the mental health crisis by focusing on addressing untreated serious mental illness that can impact public safety; continuing to increase inpatient psychiatric bed capacity; making New York a leader in the provision of mental health services to young people; taking aggressive action to bolster insurance coverage of mental health services; and going after insurers that flout our laws.

### **Improve Public Safety by Addressing Serious Mental Illness**

Research indicates that reduced access to mental health services can play an important role in future criminal justice system involvement and, further, that men with a history of mental illness are more likely to be incarcerated. Indeed, as of June 2023, roughly 20% of the population, or more than 1,200 people, in New York City jails had been diagnosed with a serious mental illness.<sup>1</sup> Significant and strategic investments in mental health services are critical to ensure that individuals receive the services they need and do not continue to be shuffled among jails, hospitals, and shelter systems – a status quo that does not improve outcomes for individuals struggling with mental illness and does not enhance public safety.

This year, Governor Hochul will provide for a new, significant expansion of psychiatric beds and services for individuals with acute needs. To address the needs of this population and minimize deeper penetration into the criminal justice system, as well as frequent emergency room visits or periods of homelessness, a continuum of interventions is necessary. These initiatives will support an unprecedented level of coordination between law enforcement and mental health professionals at the state and local level.



*Open 200 New Psychiatric Inpatient Beds*

Beginning in late 2022, Governor Hochul opened two 25-bed Transition to Home Units (THUs), which provide inpatient psychiatric care to individuals with serious mental illness who are experiencing homelessness. This year, Governor Hochul will provide funding to establish three additional 25-bed THUs to expand the availability of this successful program to additional populations in need of specialized care, including individuals with histories of recurring criminal justice involvement who are in need of psychiatric inpatient treatment. She will also create 100 new inpatient psychiatric beds in state psychiatric centers, 15 of which will serve children and adolescents who have specialized needs, including those in foster care or with other systems involvement. This builds on New York's 150 new state-operated psychiatric inpatient beds opened by the Governor in 2023. To ensure access to high-quality mental health services in New York's forensic mental health system and restore individuals who are charged with a crime to competency, the Governor will create 25 new forensic psychiatric inpatient beds, and repurpose 50 existing psychiatric inpatient beds to specifically serve individuals awaiting restoration to competency prior to trial.

*Establish a Law Enforcement and Mental Health Coordination Team*

To focus on the relatively small number of individuals known to cycle through shelter, hospitals, jails, and prisons, Governor Hochul will create a dedicated team at the Office of Mental Health (OMH). This team will be responsible for establishing and monitoring data shared by law enforcement, correctional entities, hospitals, and providers to facilitate connections to services, including housing, and will work through OMH regional field offices to collaborate with local mental health providers and resources.

*Improve Mental Health Admission and Discharge Decisions by Hospitals*

In October 2023, OMH and the Department of Health (DOH) issued joint guidance advising hospitals with inpatient psychiatric services, their emergency rooms, and Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Programs (CPEPs) of their responsibilities regarding admitting and discharging patients that present with behavioral health conditions. This year, at Governor Hochul's direction, OMH and DOH will codify this guidance through regulations. To ensure New Yorkers do not fall through the cracks after hospital visits, hospitals will be required to screen patients with mental health conditions for risk of suicide, violence, substance use, and other complex needs; provide a hand-off to an aftercare provider for those with complex needs; and schedule a follow-up psychiatric appointment within seven days. In addition, funding will be provided to OMH to expand surveillance and regulatory compliance activities across its licensed and unlicensed program settings, including hospital inpatient programs and CPEPs.

*Create New Mental Health Courts and Expand Existing Courts*

Mental health courts are an important but underutilized tool to connect individuals who do not pose a public safety risk to community-based treatment. In recognizing and seeking to meet individual mental health needs, this approach addresses underlying causes of criminal justice system involvement. To increase the number and availability of mental health courts, which have been successful in reducing rearrests and improving mental health outcomes, Governor Hochul will dedicate funding to establish new mental health courts and allow for existing courts to take on more cases.

*Fund Court-Based Mental Health Navigators*

This year, Governor Hochul will also fund mental health navigators in county court systems who will be responsible for identifying defendants who have a history of mental health treatment, lack of engagement in treatment, or other mental health concerns. These specialists, embedded in the courts, will work with the Law Enforcement and Mental Health Coordination Team and local providers to refer individuals to treatment and services,

including housing. Emphasis will be placed on recruiting navigators with lived experience of mental health challenges to facilitate greater trust and engagement.

*Increase Transitional Housing for Individuals Referred Through the Court System*

Governor Hochul will increase access to transitional housing, so individuals have options other than shelter after being released from custody. These units will be served by professionals who can provide case management assistance to individuals with mental illness in obtaining permanent housing, employment, mental health and substance use treatment, and other individualized recovery goals.

*Fund New Community-Based Mental Health Teams*

Governor Hochul will provide funding for Intensive FACT (Forensic Assertive Community Treatment) teams to deliver around-the-clock support to individuals with serious mental illness. These teams will maintain lower caseloads and provide continuous, on-the-ground engagement to facilitate connections to care and housing, ensure adherence to medication and treatment plans, and support life skill development – all with the goal of helping individuals attain stability.

*Provide More Intensive Supervision of Individuals on Parole*

To ensure individuals no longer in DOCCS custody remain connected to services, Governor Hochul will establish a specialized version of the Supervision Against Violent Engagement (SAVE) program for individuals who are under parole supervision and have mental health diagnoses. Funding will support individualized supervision plans and smaller caseloads in select counties.

### *Fund Specialized Housing for People with Serious Mental Illness and Criminal History*

For individuals with a history of repeated arrests and difficulty engaging in mental health treatment, a core component of these new investments will include developing housing units with a designated team to provide both individual-level case support and crisis and de-escalation support for residential staff. Enhanced, specially trained staffing will allow for individualized attention, improved behavioral health plan implementation, and the development of individualized crisis response plans for unsafe behaviors.

### *Provide Crisis Intervention Team Training for Law Enforcement*

Governor Hochul will expand Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training, which has been shown to support better outcomes when law enforcement responds to individuals in mental health crises, thereby also reducing arrests, and increasing connections to mental health services.

### **Provide Critical Care to Young People**

Young people are experiencing anxiety, depression, and thoughts of self-harm at alarming rates. In 2021, one in three (33.3%) high school-aged youth in New York reported depression, and 16.8% seriously considered suicide in the prior year – up from 24.9% and 12.9%, respectively, in 2011.<sup>2</sup> Tragically, hundreds of young people in New York have taken their own lives in recent years, with overall suicide rates higher in rural and suburban parts of the state.

Children and families are struggling to find mental health services – as of 2022, two in five (40.2%) children in New York with a mental health condition did not receive treatment or counseling – and face the challenges of a world that is more digitally connected than ever before.<sup>3</sup> In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General and the American Psychological Association issued public health advisories asserting the near universal use of social media by youth ages 13-17 could be creating a “profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being

of children and adolescents.”<sup>4</sup> Social media platforms are designed to maximize user engagement. Adolescents who spend more than three hours per day on social media face double the risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes like depression and anxiety.<sup>5</sup>

Governor Hochul is committed to providing access to mental health services for every school-aged child in New York State. As part of that goal, in 2024, Governor Hochul will ensure that young people get access to the right supports, including youth-led programs, school-based and intensive therapeutic supports, and a specialized workforce trained in providing support and treatment in ways that resonate with young people.

#### *Establish a School-Based Mental Health Clinic in Any School That Wants One*

Governor Hochul has made school-based mental health clinics a pillar of her broader mental health agenda and is committed to expanding the model across New York. School-based mental health clinics afford students access to mental health services provided by qualified clinicians that may not otherwise be available and have numerous benefits, providing connections to appropriate treatment for mental health conditions while also supporting better educational outcomes. This year, Governor Hochul will continue the expansion of school-based mental health clinics in any New York school that wants to establish one, with continued start-up funding, enhanced reimbursement rates for school-based mental health services, and enhanced enforcement of laws that ensure that all insurers pay adequately for school-based services, regardless of their insurance type or their insurance plan’s network.

#### *Expand Peer-to-Peer Support Programs*

At youth mental health listening sessions held across the state in 2023, New York’s youth shared that they want greater access to programs that are youth-driven and youth-centered. This year, Governor Hochul will increase funding for Teen Mental Health First Aid training programs, which utilize peer ambassadors to engage teens who are disconnected,

as well as support safe spaces where teens can be themselves, engage with peers, participate in recreational activities, and have time away from their online lives.

*Establish New Youth ACT Teams Statewide*

Beginning in 2022, under Governor Hochul’s leadership, New York launched the first and largest implementation of the Youth Assertive Community Treatment (Youth ACT) program in the country. These teams support children and families in their homes, schools, and communities, and provide wraparound care that includes crisis support, psychotherapy, medication management, and skill-building – preventing hospitalization. To enable young people struggling with mental illness to stay in their homes and school communities, rather than receiving treatment in residential and inpatient settings, Governor Hochul will expand the Youth ACT program to ensure teams are available to more youth and families.

*Expand Access to the Partial Hospitalization and Children’s Day Treatment Programs*

For youth who need intensive, daily treatment to address mental health needs, Governor Hochul will expand access to all-day programs like the Partial Hospitalization model and Children’s Day Treatment programs in schools. These programs enable children to stay in their homes, supported by their families and caregivers, while receiving intensive care in their schools or within community-based treatment settings, instead of potentially disruptive out-of-home placements. These programs have proven effective and allow for regular family involvement and family-inclusive therapy.

*Fund Programming for High-Need Transition-Age Youth*

For youth who need residential support, Governor Hochul will dedicate funding to Children’s Community Residences, with a particular focus on young New Yorkers with child

welfare involvement, empowering reunification with families and the building of networks as youth age into early adulthood. Children’s Community Residences are community-based programs that allow students to go to community schools and continue to participate in extracurriculars, jobs, and community activities. Funding will be used to expand training and specialty services within these programs to ensure that these settings can best serve youth, including those transitioning to adulthood.

*Expand Loan Repayment Program for Children’s Mental Health Practitioners*

Young people need mental health clinicians who understand their needs. Most mental health clinicians do not receive specialized training in youth and family mental health and there is a shortage of child psychiatrists and child-serving mental health clinicians across many areas of New York, as is the case across the nation. Loan repayment is a successful strategy that supports recruitment and retention of these clinicians and allows individuals who are historically underrepresented within the social service workforce the opportunity to go into public service for the benefit of young New Yorkers.

This year, Governor Hochul will expand the Community Mental Health Loan Repayment Program, with slots specifically for clinicians who work in child-serving agencies and treat children and families, including both OMH and the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) licensed settings.

*Limit Social Media Features Harmful to Youth Mental Health*

In partnership with the Attorney General and members of the Legislature, Governor Hochul will advance legislation to curb the harmful impacts of social media.

Currently, social media platforms supplement the content that users view from the accounts they follow by serving them content from accounts they do not subscribe to or follow. This content is curated using algorithms that gather and display content based on a variety of factors. Algorithmic feeds have been shown to be addictive because they

prioritize content that keeps users on the platform longer. Addictive feeds are correlated with an increase in the amount of time that teens and young adults spend on social media, as well as significant negative mental health outcomes for minors.

To address this problem, the Stop Addictive Feeds Exploitation for Kids Act (SAFE for Kids Act) will require social media companies to restrict addictive features that harm young users the most. The legislation will allow users under 18 to receive a default chronological feed from users they already follow – the same way that social media feeds functioned before the advent of addictive feeds. Users may also search for specific topics of interest. Minors may opt in to receiving addictive feeds with parental consent. Additionally, parents will be allowed to block access to social media platforms between certain hours, and similarly prohibit the social media companies from sending notifications to minors between certain hours without parental consent. The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) will be empowered to bring actions forward with civil penalties up to \$5,000 per violation.

Additionally, the New York Child Data Protection Act will prohibit online sites from collecting, using, sharing, or selling personal data of anyone under the age of 18, unless they receive informed consent or unless doing so is strictly necessary for the purpose of the website. For users under the age of 13, this informed consent must come from a parent. The bill authorizes the OAG to enforce the law and may enjoin, seek damages, or civil penalties of up to \$5,000 per violation.

#### *Develop Social Media Resources for Youth and Caregivers*

To support young people and the adults in their lives in navigating social media and its effects, New York will make a variety of educational resources available. These will include an evidence-based educational series around digital wellness tailored for caregivers, as well as resources for students that cover critical topics such as the risks of social media use, understanding privacy and protecting personal information, and reporting cyberbullying and online abuse and exploitation.



### *Convene Youth Mental Health Advisory Boards*

In keeping with Governor Hochul's commitment to hearing directly from young people about their experiences and needs, the Office of Mental Health will form a Youth Advisory Board to ensure that youth-informed best practices continue to be incorporated in developing behavioral health programs and policies. This will help harness the power of young people and their families and ensure all policy is driven by those most impacted.

### **Expand Insurance Coverage and Hold Insurers Accountable**

New Yorkers of all ages deserve access to quality, affordable mental health care that meets their individual needs, whether that be counseling or more intensive outpatient services. Yet access to care remains out of reach for many, with insurance covering too little and at insufficient rates to adequately reimburse licensed providers. One in ten New Yorkers report having had problems accessing mental health or substance use services due to cost, and nationwide, cost is the top reason adults with serious mental illness who need care have not received it.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, while insurers are required by law to provide parity in access to behavioral health services, this is not always happening in practice, and strong enforcement actions are necessary to motivate insurers to change their practices. Building off steps taken last year to expand insurance coverage of school-based mental health services, this year, Governor Hochul will advance a comprehensive plan to increase access to care through improvements to insurance coverage, strengthened enforcement of parity requirements, and new regulations to increase access to needed services.

### *Strengthen Mental Health Parity Enforcement*

Under both federal and New York State law, insurance companies are required to provide insured individuals with access to behavioral health services that are comparable to other medical services. While these laws have been on the books for many years, the frustration

and delays that many New Yorkers experience in trying to access mental health care today indicate that far stronger enforcement is necessary to realize true parity. To begin to right this dynamic and hold insurers to account, Governor Hochul will bring the full weight of the State's enforcement authority to bear, funding additional staff to bring enforcement actions and introducing legislation to double fines that insurers face for noncompliance with parity requirements.

#### *Require Increased Commercial Insurance Reimbursement Rates for Mental Health Services*

Despite laws requiring parity, many commercial plans pay for mental health services at levels that do not adequately compensate providers for the costs incurred to deliver services. A national study revealed that in 2017 reimbursement rates for primary care were 23.8% higher than for behavioral health care.<sup>7</sup> Low reimbursements drive providers to remain out-of-network and require insureds to pay higher rates to access care. The same study found that in New York, behavioral health visits were over ten times more likely to be out-of-network than primary care visits – among the largest disparities in the country. When an insured goes out of network, they may face higher cost sharing responsibilities and receive only modest payment from their plan to offset the provider's charges.

Building on action taken last year to increase rates for school-based mental health clinics, and with the aim of improving access to mental health providers, Governor Hochul will pursue legislation to require adequate reimbursement of OMH- and OASAS-licensed outpatient services at least at the Medicaid rate for comparable services.

#### *Increase Access to Care Through Network Adequacy Regulations*

New Yorkers all too often struggle to find a mental health provider that is covered by their insurance, having to seek care out of network or wait a long time to be seen. No New Yorker, having identified a mental health need, should have to wait months for an

appointment. To address barriers to accessing care, New York is promulgating network adequacy regulations for both commercial and Medicaid insurers that will set standards related to access to mental health and substance use disorder services, including appointment wait times. If insurers cannot provide appointments for behavioral health services within a specific number of days, they will have to provide out-of-network coverage at no additional cost. The regulations will also require plans to maintain transparent and accurate network provider directories.

#### *Issue Guidance on Free Mental Health Screenings*

While New York State law already requires comprehensive-type insurance policies to cover annual well care visits and preventive and primary care services, many residents may not know these are covered without cost to the insured, and many insurance companies may not advertise this fact to their members or network providers. New York State will issue guidance to ensure plans cover these screenings in mental health, primary care, substance use disorder, and integrated settings without cost.

#### *Increase Medicaid Reimbursement for Mental Health Services in DOH Facilities and Private Practices*

Today, Medicaid typically pays a higher rate for mental health services offered in an OMH-licensed “Article 31” facility than for services offered in a DOH-licensed “Article 28” facility or a private physician practice. To expand access to mental health care within DOH facilities and private practices, New York will increase support for mental health services in these facilities.

## **SECTION 2:**

### **KEEPING NEW YORKERS SAFE**

Over the last two years, Governor Hochul has made keeping all New Yorkers safe a top priority, taking decisive action and dedicating unprecedented budget investments toward efforts to stem gun violence, restore balance in our approach to crime, and achieve fairness and equity in our criminal justice system.

In her first budget, Governor Hochul succeeded in: tripling funding for gun-tracing efforts; expanding the scope and doubling the level of support for New York State's Gun Involved Violence Elimination (GIVE) initiative, which supported local law enforcement in the 17 counties where more than 80% of the state's violent crime is committed outside of New York City; establishing a multi-state gun trafficking task force; and expanding the State Police's Community Stabilization Units, where groups of the most experienced State Troopers partner with local law enforcement agencies, business owners, and community leaders on local and neighborhood-specific crime problems.

Later in 2022, through two rounds of groundbreaking legislation, Governor Hochul strengthened New York's gun laws, including: making statutory changes to address the U.S. Supreme Court's decision on concealed carry; requiring a license to purchase a semiautomatic rifle and raising the age to purchase a semiautomatic rifle to 21 years old; expanding New York's Red Flag law; banning body armor other than for people in select professions; enacting gun microstamping legislation to help law enforcement trace shell casings found at crime scenes; and creating a new system of background checks that closed loopholes, added new relevant information, and allowed for background checks for ammunition purchases.

In 2023, the Governor doubled down on these efforts by committing additional funding to the strategies that are working, including expanding investments in alternatives to incarceration and re-entry services; again doubling GIVE funding, from \$18 million to \$36

million; more than doubling and expanding the State-supported Crime Analysis Network to 11 centers across the state; launching an unprecedented four new State Police Academy classes; further expanding Community Stabilization units to as many as 25 communities; and expanding funding for District Attorneys' offices around the state.

These actions by Governor Hochul have worked in combination with the efforts of local and federal law enforcement agencies around the state to reduce murders and shootings. While there is more work to do, the data show real progress.

In October 2023, the FBI released 2022 national crime statistics. New York had the lowest murder rate of the ten most populated states with over 10 million residents and a murder rate 37% lower than the national average.<sup>8</sup> In 2023, New York City murders were down 12% year over year and down a preliminary 27% in the rest of the state. Outside of New York City, murders have returned to 2018 levels and near the historic lows of 2019.

In 2023, shootings were down substantially from their pandemic peak, both in New York City (down 38% from 2021) and in GIVE jurisdictions around the state (down 35%). New York City has now returned to 2016 levels of shootings and GIVE jurisdictions have returned to 2017 levels.

Alongside these efforts on gun violence and crime reduction, Governor Hochul sought and achieved commonsense changes to New York's bail laws, including expanding the factors judges must consider when making bail decisions; making repeat offenses involving theft of property both bail-eligible and arrest-eligible; allowing judges to set bail for the three remaining felony gun offenses that had been made ineligible for bail as part of the 2019 bail reforms; and eliminating language in the law requiring judges to set bail based on the "least restrictive" conditions necessary to ensure a defendant's return to court.

Governor Hochul has also taken significant steps to advance a vision of a more humane criminal justice system — one that creates conditions for incarcerated individuals to safely reintegrate into their communities and gain stability, reducing recidivism. Current research shows New York has the lowest recidivism rates in decades. From expanding the Tuition Assistance Program to incarcerated individuals to signing Clean Slate legislation to open up

new avenues to economic opportunity, Governor Hochul remains committed to fairness in the system and ensuring that a New Yorker's past is not determinative of their future.

While we have made great progress, Governor Hochul recognizes how much more there is to do to make New York as safe as it can and should be. In 2024, Governor Hochul will advance a multi-pronged agenda to improve public safety, continuing to support what works, and focusing on the criminal activities that have been resistant to interventions to date and contribute the most to New Yorkers feeling unsafe in their communities.

### **Expand the List of Crimes Eligible for Prosecution as a Hate Crime**

Between 2018 and 2022, the number of hate crime incidents increased by 69% in New York City and by 109% outside of New York City. Governor Hochul has led efforts to fight hate in all its forms, including in the wake of the recent rise in hate crimes, which have been driven by a spike in anti-Jewish incidents in New York City (up 95% compared to the same period of 2022 since October 2023) and the rest of the state. Governor Hochul deployed additional State Police to the Joint Terrorism Task Force and the Hate Crimes Task Force, launched a new hotline for reporting incidents of hate, and disbursed millions in grant funding to support security improvements for nonprofit community groups, cultural museums, and civic organizations statewide. This year, to strengthen our laws and hold perpetrators of hate accountable, Governor Hochul will advance legislation to expand the list of offenses eligible for prosecution as a hate crime.

### **Combat Unlicensed Sale of Cannabis**

New York is building a robust new cannabis market grounded in a social equity framework that will generate millions of dollars in revenue for the State and communities harmed by the legacy of cannabis criminalization. Combatting the sale of unlicensed cannabis around the state is essential for achieving these goals. Retail sale of cannabis without a license slows the growth of the burgeoning market and creates a public health and safety concern

that requires immediate action to protect New Yorkers. In 2024, New York will strengthen enforcement authority to expedite the closure of unlicensed businesses and deter this illicit activity. Specifically, Governor Hochul will propose legislation to strengthen the Cannabis Law to better enable the Office of Cannabis Management (OCM), as well as local government agencies, to seal or padlock an unlicensed cannabis business. These are necessary steps towards shutting down unlawful and unlicensed cannabis operations that jeopardize public safety and the integrity of the State's legal cannabis market.

### **Stop Organized Retail Theft**

While nationwide, larceny and theft offenses have decreased by 14% since the pandemic, larceny has increased in New York. Although no part of the state has been immune, incidences of larceny have been particularly conspicuous in New York City.

In New York, compared to the pre-pandemic baseline (2017-2019), the rate of larceny crimes per 100,000 residents in 2022 had increased 20%. In the first nine months of 2023, larceny offenses increased 8% in New York City compared to the same period in 2022. The increase has been more modest in the rest of the state, at 3% year over year, but trending upward. There are serious concerns about the problem spreading, driven by organized retail theft networks.

In recognition of the stress and financial strain business owners and retail workers are experiencing, as well as New Yorkers' quality-of-life concerns, this year Governor Hochul will advance a comprehensive plan to tackle property crime and bring relief to small businesses.

#### *Launch New York State Police Efforts to Build Cases*

Governor Hochul will deploy a dedicated New York State Police team to build cases against organized retail theft rings. Additionally, funding will be allocated to set up a New York State Police Smash and Grab Enforcement Unit. These new State Police initiatives,

alongside dedicated funding for District Attorneys, will allow for the increased use, enforcement, and prosecution of Trespass Affidavits and other legal strategies to assist small business owners victimized by retail theft.

*Establish Federal, State, and Local Law Enforcement Joint Operation*

Governor Hochul will launch a Law Enforcement Joint Operation on Retail Theft to coordinate the response of law enforcement agencies and prosecutors. Modeled on the successful intra-state task force on gun trafficking, the group will focus on combating organized retail theft crime. The joint operation will be anchored around the Division of Criminal Justice Service's Crime Analysis Center (CAC) Network of eleven centers spread throughout the state.

*Fund Dedicated Retail Theft Teams in District Attorneys' Offices*

In addition to increasing funding for the New York State Police to tackle retail theft, Governor Hochul will provide funding for dedicated teams in District Attorneys' offices throughout the state to address the rise in cases of property crime, with a primary focus on organized retail theft.

*Fund Local Law Enforcement and Expand Evidence Collection to Combat Retail Theft*

Governor Hochul will direct funding to local jurisdictions partnering with our Crime Analysis Centers to build the capacity of local law enforcement across the state in combating retail theft. She will also expand the resources of our CACs and provide a central clearinghouse for information from retailers victimized by organized crime theft.

Data, intelligence, and evidence will be collected by the CACs and shared with local law enforcement to enhance the investigation and prosecution of these crimes across state jurisdictions.



*Establish Commercial Security Tax Credit*

To help business owners offset the costs of certain store security measures, Governor Hochul will propose legislation to establish a Commercial Security Tax Credit.

*Make it Illegal to Facilitate Sales of Stolen Goods Online*

Increasingly, organized retail theft rings are leveraging the convenience and anonymity of online platforms to sell stolen goods. While a new federal law now requires online marketplaces to verify certain information about sellers, more can be done to stop the sale of stolen goods and go after the platforms that make it easy and lucrative. To that end, Governor Hochul will propose legislation to establish criminal penalties for fostering the sale of stolen goods, including online.

*Increase Criminal Penalties for Assault of a Retail Worker*

Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers work in retail, assisting customers with the purchase of goods in thousands of stores across the state – from the corner bodega to the largest pharmacies and department stores. No one working in these public-facing positions should fear being assaulted on the job, and Governor Hochul will propose legislation to increase criminal penalties for assaulting a retail worker.

**Eliminate the Cap on State Supreme Court Judges**

Our court system has been plagued by delays and backlogs that interfere with the swift administration of justice and exacerbate our public safety challenges. Part of the problem is an antiquated constraint, embedded in the constitution, on the number of Supreme Court judges, which has a cascading impact on both Supreme Courts and lower courts.

The current system for determining the number of judges that can be elected, codified under Article 6 of the State Constitution, caps the number of Supreme Court judges at one per 50,000 people. This population-based formula is grossly outdated, fails to account for the growing demands on the courts in each judicial district and, despite the obvious need as evidenced by the backlog in cases and decline in jury trials, constrains the Legislature from authorizing a sufficient number of judges in certain counties.

The practice of pulling judges from the lower courts to serve as acting supreme court justices has exacerbated delays elsewhere in the system, deferring justice for too many New Yorkers. This year, Governor Hochul will take a bold first step toward ending this unworkable system by proposing a constitutional amendment to eliminate the cap on the number of elected Supreme Court justices.

### **Prevent and Prosecute Assaults and Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence accounts for approximately 40% of felony assaults in New York City and 30% of aggravated assaults outside of New York City. Domestic homicides account for roughly 20% of homicides in any given year in the state. In New York, police departments respond to nearly eleven hundred domestic incident calls a day.

Many domestic violence offenders are never prosecuted, and dismissal rates remain high across the state but particularly in New York City. Absent prosecution, offenders' abusive behavior may continue and escalate. Given this, and consistent with Governor Hochul's longstanding commitment to supporting victims of domestic violence, New York will make bold investments in a set of proven strategies to increase the likelihood of successfully prosecuting domestic violence cases and seizing firearms, deter future violence among high-risk offenders, and help survivors recover and gain stability.

*Expand "DV STAT" to District Attorneys Around the State*

To address the dismal and high dismissal rates in domestic violence cases, as high as 84% in New York City, Governor Hochul will provide dedicated funding to District Attorneys' offices across the state to expand the Domestic Violence Strategic Threat Alert Team (DV STAT) model, a proactive, victim-centered, and evidence-driven approach developed and implemented by the Office of the Queens District Attorney.

The DV STAT program seeks to identify and enhance the prosecution of high-risk domestic violence cases after a crime has occurred, but before the offender is apprehended. Roughly 50% of domestic abusers flee the scene before police arrive. By working with victims immediately after an incident, when the circumstances are fresh and the parties involved are proximate, the DV STAT model enables prosecutors, police, and domestic violence service providers to better assist victims and incapacitate offenders. To protect survivors, prosecutors will secure time-sensitive evidence such as texts, voicemails, and social media posts; and obtain search warrants. At the same time, they will connect survivors to resources. Using early case coordination, all aspects of domestic violence response will be enhanced – survivors will get the support they need; cases will be stronger; and those who present the greatest threat will be brought to account.

#### *Fund Domestic Violence Risk Assessment and Improve Reporting*

Governor Hochul will direct funding to jurisdictions to implement proven risk assessment tools to focus on complaint risk factors, serious and repeat domestic violence perpetrators, and most-at-risk survivors. To that end, Governor Hochul will direct the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) to work with the State's Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV) to review the current capacity of law enforcement information sharing regarding domestic violence reports by soliciting stakeholder feedback and assessing the impact of new resources. New York will modernize the use of critical data available when answering domestic calls for service through the Domestic Incident Report (DIR) and expand the use of the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) so critical and potentially life-saving information and reports are electronic, shareable, and searchable statewide. This will ensure that law enforcement can more quickly access

critical information regarding domestic violence incidents and offenders and effectuate arrests, as well as best support survivors and connect them with community-based organizations that can provide them with the support they need.

*Fund GIVE Jurisdictions to Stop Cycles of Domestic Violence*

The risk of domestic homicide increases by 500% when a firearm is present in the home. Building on the success of existing efforts to reduce gun violence and firearm-related violent crime, dedicated funding will be provided to law enforcement in GIVE jurisdictions to focus on domestic violence offenders in order to identify and engage with the most high-risk individuals and reduce recidivism.

*Expand the Supervision Against Violent Engagement Program to Focus on Domestic Violence*

Governor Hochul will direct funding to expand the Supervision Against Violent Engagement (SAVE) program to support closer supervision of parolees at high risk of committing domestic violence, ensuring that specially trained parole officers, with smaller caseloads, are assigned to these individuals. This builds on the work that the SAVE program, advanced in 2023, is already undertaking to tackle gun violence.

*Establish SAFE Fund to Support Survivors in Immediate Crisis*

Governor Hochul will continue her commitment to providing survivors with the emergency funding aid they need at their time of crisis via the establishment of the SAFE (Survivors Access Financial Empowerment) Fund. To support survivors' ability to gain stability, these microgrants can be used by survivors of domestic violence to cover expenses in emergency situations.

## **Fund Intensive Case Management and Programming for Youth**

Ensuring effective interventions for youth at risk of engaging in criminal activity is critical to improving outcomes for young people and reducing crime. Indeed, young people are responsible for a disproportionate share of robberies and felony thefts in New York City. In order to intervene more quickly and prevent escalating behavior, and to ensure young people have access to appropriate services and supervision, Governor Hochul will increase funding for the Supervision and Treatment Services for Juveniles Program (STSJP) administered by the Office of Children and Family Services. Funding will support intensive, wraparound case management and programming with the aim of deterring criminal acts.

## **Support Re-Entry and Reduce Recidivism**

### *Expand College Programming to All State Prisons*

Education is a critical rehabilitative tool that enhances an incarcerated individual's personal development, career prospects, and reentry to the community. Yet college programming is not currently available in all of New York State's Department of Corrections and Community Supervision's (DOCCS) correctional facilities. Furthermore, there are presently no articulation agreements among colleges currently operating in DOCCS facilities. This means that incarcerated individuals who change facilities may not have their credits transferred to the college operating in the receiving facility. To increase access to education, DOCCS will expand college programs to all facilities (from 36 to 44) and enhance existing programs, while also ensuring articulation agreements are in place for transferability of credits between programs. In addition, DOCCS will develop a reading remediation program to enhance reading skills among the general population.

### *Expand Transitional Housing Opportunities*

In the summer of 2022, New York began piloting a new approach to transitional housing for individuals post-incarceration. Since then, 215 participants have been admitted into the

90-day transitional program at the Edgecombe Residential Treatment Facility, with a 7% return-to-custody rate compared to a baseline of roughly 25% for that time period in 2018 and 2019. More than half of those who participate in the program found permanent housing (51%). The employment rate for those who finish the program (54%) was at least ten points higher than those released into community supervision.

This year, building upon the success of this program, funding will be provided to continue the transitional housing program into the future. Additionally, eligibility for transitional housing will be expanded to include women released from custody to New York City and the surrounding area.

#### *Launch Suicide Prevention Initiative*

While recent strategies to prevent suicides among the population in DOCCS custody have shown progress, reducing attempted suicides by 31% from 207 in 2019 to 143 in 2023, there are still many suicides and suicide attempts each year. More can and should be done to address the needs of the incarcerated population most at risk of suicide. To that end, DOCCS will advance an initiative to prevent suicides by creating protective environments and identifying and supporting incarcerated individuals at risk, particularly those who are repeatedly engaging in self-harm and having extended Residential Crisis Treatment Program stays. This strategy will be reviewed routinely to discuss appropriate therapeutic approaches, promote healthy connections, and determine appropriate services and placement that may be necessary to mitigate risk.

#### **Reduce Fatal Fires**

Unlike most disasters that New Yorkers may face, fires can be prevented, and the more we know about trending causes of fires, the more we can do to prevent them. This year, Governor Hochul will advance several strategies to tackle the increase in fire deaths, addressing both residential fire safety and lithium-ion battery safety. These include

providing funding to the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES) to launch Fire Action Teams, which will be dispatched to fatal fires to evaluate causal factors and develop resources tailored to communities' specific risk factors, and to expand the State's fire investigation capacity. Additionally, Governor Hochul will advance legislation to ban sales of lithium-ion batteries that do not meet minimum standards for safety.

### **Support First Responders with Mental Health Services**

Stress is inherent in emergency response jobs such as law enforcement, firefighting, policing, disaster relief, and emergency medical services, and it has the potential to interfere with an individual's ability to function at a scene and in their daily lives. The nature of emergency response puts first responders at elevated risk of certain mental health conditions, and law enforcement officers in particular are more likely to commit suicide than those in non-uniformed professions. The individuals who provide such invaluable public services in our communities deserve access to resources to support their mental health and wellbeing without shame or stigma. To that end, this year, Governor Hochul will increase funding for suicide prevention programming and peer-to-peer training for first responder organizations.

## **SECTION 3: PROTECTING CONSUMERS AND THEIR POCKETBOOKS**

Under Governor Hochul’s leadership, New York State has taken significant action to help hard-working New Yorkers through a national cost-of-living crisis, including:

- Enacted a historic increase to New York’s minimum wage that results in annual wage increases through 2027, when it will then index to the rate of inflation, ensuring that wages keep pace with the cost of living, and making New York one of the first states to do so.
- Accelerating a \$1.2 billion middle-class tax cut and providing a homeowner tax rebate to almost 2.5 million New Yorkers.
- Expanding income eligibility for child care subsidies to 85% of state median income.
- Providing \$400 million in relief to New Yorkers experiencing high electric bills, while lowering energy burdens through electrifications and retrofits.
- Expanding the Empire State Child Credit to include children under four years of age, providing \$179 million in support for over 525,000 low- and middle-income taxpayers.

Over the last two years, Governor Hochul has focused on putting more money in New Yorkers’ pockets. This year, she will fight to keep it there. Governor Hochul’s agenda will protect New Yorkers from predatory business practices used to bilk them out of their hard-earned cash and safeguard them from being crushed by the costs of medical care.

### **Prohibit Unfair Business Practices**



While the vast majority of businesses are honest and fair, provide essential goods and services, and enhance their communities, a small number of bad actors can give entire industries a bad name, and hurt hardworking New Yorkers in the process. New York State law is uniquely and unexpectedly ill-equipped to stop them.

Despite a national reputation as a leader on consumer protection, New York is now one of only eight states in the nation whose laws fail to fully protect against unfair or abusive business practices. Currently, only conduct that is *deceptive* is prohibited under state law. For example, the Attorney General may be blocked from taking action against a student loan servicer who steers borrowers to the most expensive repayment options, or from stopping an unscrupulous debt collector who manipulates retired seniors into giving up protected income.

Putting a stop to these exploitative tactics is a cornerstone of Governor Hochul's agenda for the year ahead. She will propose legislation to expand New York's consumer protection law for the first time in more than 40 years, by making unfair and abusive business practices illegal and giving the Office of the Attorney General a path to punish predatory operators.

### **Regulate “Buy Now, Pay Later” Loans**

New Yorkers increasingly use Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) loans to pay for both everyday purchases (e.g., groceries purchased through Amazon and Target) and large purchases (e.g., technology and furniture). Many consumers view BNPL loans as a low-cost alternative to traditional credit products, and merchants are reporting increased sales due to the availability of BNPL financing. Certain aspects of BNPL loans and providers' practices, however, pose risks to consumers. These include:

- *Overextension and debt accumulation*: About two-thirds of all BNPL customers spend more than they otherwise would when using BNPL to make purchases.
- *Inconsistent credit reporting*: The reporting of BNPL loans to credit reporting agencies varies among providers, as does the information that is reported.

- *Data harvesting and exploitation:* Consumer spending data may be collected from BNPL users without their consent, and consumers may not be given the option to opt out of data collection. This data may then be used in marketing and user interface design to encourage users to increase their spending and utilization of BNPL products.
- *Inadequate dispute resolution services:* BNPL providers have divergent policies regarding consumer disputes and product returns, which are sometimes handled by the BNPL provider and sometimes handled by merchants.
- *Inadequate disclosure of terms:* Many BNPL loans are not subject to Truth in Lending Act provisions, which require uniform disclosure of loan costs and terms. This means consumers may be less likely to understand the product they are using.
- *Excessive late fees and other fees:* Late fees and other charges may be disproportionate to the outstanding loan amount. Such fees also may not be clearly disclosed to consumers, who may believe they are getting a product that does not have associated fees. Currently, the law does not establish specific fee disclosure requirements for many BNPL products or set fee limits.

BNPL loans now account for 5% of all North American e-commerce transactions, and the global value of BNPL loans is estimated to reach \$500 billion by 2026. Households earning \$20,001 to \$50,000 a year are most likely to use BNPL services<sup>9</sup>, and are, on average, much more likely to be highly indebted, revolve on their credit cards, have delinquencies in traditional credit products, and use high-interest financial services such as payday, pawn, and overdraft compared to non-BNPL borrowers. While most BNPL services don't charge interest, they do charge late fees – and users are increasingly accumulating late fees over time.

Because BNPL lenders generally charge zero or low interest, and generally originate the loan themselves, the Department of Financial Services' (DFS) existing licensed lender and sales financing licensing regimes under the Banking Law generally do not apply to BNPL

lenders. As a result, DFS has limited visibility into BNPL lenders' business practices, and the resulting risks to consumers.

At Governor Hochul's direction, DFS will enact a licensing and supervision regime for BNPL loans to enable DFS to have greater oversight over a rapidly evolving financial product. This will allow DFS to regulate the industry with a focus on building stronger consumer protections around disclosure requirements, dispute resolution and credit reporting standards, late fee limits, consumer data privacy, and guidelines to curtail dark patterns and debt accumulation and overextension.

### **Ensure New Yorkers Don't Get Buried by Medical Debt**

Despite record-low uninsured rates and recent legislation aimed at easing the burden of medical debt, more than 700,000 New Yorkers still have medical debt in collections.<sup>10</sup> Substantial debt levels threaten not only the financial stability of many individuals and families,<sup>11</sup> but also undermine the State's commitment to improving health outcomes and health equity, as debt is concentrated heavily in low-income communities of color.<sup>12</sup> Individuals with medical debt are less likely to seek necessary medical care and report being forced to cut back on critical health-related social needs, including food, heat, and rent.<sup>13</sup>

Though New York State law and the federal Affordable Care Act require nonprofit hospitals to offer financial assistance, this financial assistance is often inadequate to prevent New Yorkers from accruing medical debt. As a result, nearly 75% of those with medical debt owe at least some of it to a hospital.<sup>14</sup> In addition, many individuals who should be eligible for financial assistance never receive it. From 2015 to 2020, New York hospitals sued more than 50,000 patients for unpaid bills, many of whom should have benefited from discounted care.<sup>15</sup>

To address the ongoing medical affordability crisis, Governor Hochul will introduce a comprehensive plan to establish New York as a leading state in the fight against medical debt. In 2023, Governor Hochul's enacted budget included legislation to create a simplified

statewide universal financial assistance application. Governor Hochul also signed legislation to prevent medical debt from negatively impacting New Yorkers' access to credit. In 2024, the Governor will introduce legislation to limit hospital lawsuits against low-income patients for medical debt, which disproportionately harm communities of color. This legislation will also update and expand New York's hospital financial assistance law, limit the size of monthly payments and interest charged for medical debt, and expand patient protections to mitigate the worst impacts of medical debt on New Yorkers.

### **Increase Paid Medical and Disability Leave Benefits**

The maximum paid benefit available to New Yorkers who need time off from work to address *their own* health needs, including for any pregnancy-related conditions, has been capped at \$170/week since 1989. Adjusting for inflation, \$170 today was worth approximately \$69 in 1989 — in other words, the benefit today is worth less than half of what it was worth when the cap was set. Once a leader in this space, New York has fallen behind other states that offer maximum weekly benefits ranging from \$640 to \$1,470. The lack of a substantial medical leave benefit forces New Yorkers to make the choice between their own health and their families' economic security.

Approximately 70% of medical leave claims are made by women, 36% of which are related to a pregnancy, including recovering from childbirth. Data suggest that medical leave is underutilized in New York: the average duration of leave here is 7.7 weeks, while in California and New Jersey, where the maximum medical leave benefit is over \$900, the average durations of leave are 10.14 and 15.6 weeks, respectively.

Strengthening medical leave will also support the nearly 1 in 5 New Yorkers with a disability, who often need leave from work to manage disability-related health needs. People with disabilities are disproportionately lower income, with nearly half of families with a member with a disability living in or near poverty.

To ensure that New Yorkers have adequate leave to care for their medical needs, Governor Hochul will propose an amendment to the disability law to increase the maximum weekly

benefit and tie it to the Statewide Average Weekly Wage (SAWW). To match New York's paid family leave benefit, for the first 12 weeks of medical leave, eligible employees will receive 67% of their average weekly wage, capped at 67% of the SAWW. This increase will be phased in over five years.

### **Eliminate Co-Pays for Insulin**

Approximately 1.58 million New Yorkers have been diagnosed with diabetes, with a disproportionate impact on communities of color, increasing the divide in health equity.<sup>16</sup> Low-income adults have a risk of diabetes that is more than double of those not living in poverty,<sup>17</sup> and Black New Yorkers are more than twice as likely to die from diabetes compared to white New Yorkers.<sup>18</sup> Studies have shown that 25% of those who use insulin have reduced their dose or stopped taking it all together due to costs, increasing the likelihood of further health complications.<sup>19 20</sup>

Currently, cost-sharing for insulin prescriptions in New York is capped at \$100 for a 30-day supply. These costs, though capped, remain a significant barrier for many low-income New Yorkers. This year, Governor Hochul will propose legislation to eliminate cost-sharing for insulin for all plans under the Department of Financial Services' regulatory authority. This will increase access to insulin treatments, which will improve the health of New Yorkers, help to close the health equity gap, and lower long-term health care costs.

## **SECTION 4:**

# **LEADING ON INNOVATION**

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming our world and with it, the global economy. AI is anticipated to transform the way we work, the way we access information, and our collective capacity to address complex challenges.

If utilized responsibly, AI has the potential to yield enormous benefits. AI tools can help accelerate medical breakthroughs, including assisting healthcare professionals to better analyze diagnostic data to care for their patients. AI can help dissect complex data sets, including detecting and tracing financial crimes across global banking systems. AI-powered speech recognition systems can help people with developmental disabilities translate speech to text. As we confront the challenges of climate change, AI can help monitor and predict power outages, and model extreme weather patterns so we can better prepare for them.

However, as technological progress on AI systems accelerates at breakneck pace, it is clear that if left unchecked, risks associated with AI have the potential to challenge our security, our shared prosperity, and our future. Researchers have documented instances of AI tools exacerbating bias, reinforcing discrimination, disseminating disinformation, or causing other societal harms. It is imperative that AI tools must be used responsibly and transparently to protect the public interest.

Governor Hochul will ensure New York State helps shape the trajectory of AI development, so that New Yorkers benefit from this era of unprecedented innovation and they are protected from its risks.

### **Establish Empire AI Consortium to Drive Research and Innovation**

To secure New York’s place at the forefront of the AI economy, Governor Hochul will launch Empire AI, a consortium of New York’s leading research institutions that will establish a state-of-the-art artificial intelligence computing center to promote responsible research and development, create jobs, and unlock AI opportunities focused on public good.

Currently, access to the computing resources that power AI systems is prohibitively expensive and hard to obtain. Building advanced AI systems requires significant amounts of data, resources, and specialized computing infrastructure. This infrastructure is increasingly concentrated in the hands of large, well-funded multinational technology companies that maintain outsized control of the AI development ecosystem.

As a result, researchers, public interest organizations, and small companies are being left behind, which has enormous implications for safety and society. Lack of access to this technology by educational and research institutions also undercuts their ability to incubate AI-focused tech start-ups in New York, which drive job growth.

By creating Empire AI, Governor Hochul will bridge this gap and accelerate the development of AI research and innovation centered in public interest. Empire AI will be a consortium that includes seven founding institutions—Columbia, Cornell, New York University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, the State University of New York (SUNY), the City University of New York (CUNY), and the Flatiron Institute. These institutions will share access to large amounts of specialized computing power, allowing for efficiencies of scale that are out of reach for any single university.

Empire AI will be funded through a combination of public and private investment totaling over \$400 million, including up to \$275 million from the State in grant and other funding, and more than \$125 million from the founding institutions and other private partners. This scale and sophistication will allow for the acquisition of the computing infrastructure needed to enable pioneering research and development, situating New York at the forefront of national efforts of innovation and economic development in AI.

By empowering faculty at New York State’s world-class research institutions, Empire AI will help attract academic talent, expand educational opportunity, generate jobs, continue

to draw significant Federal resources to our state, and give rise to a wave of responsible innovation that will significantly strengthen our state's economy.

Empire AI will increase collaboration and bring together AI researchers, entrepreneurs, nonprofits, and other collaborators to advance the use of ethical AI for positive societal impact and ensure New York continues to lead on emerging technology.

### **Lead by Example with Responsible AI Governance**

Governor Hochul will also lead by ensuring agencies within State government understand how to responsibly harness the opportunity of AI technology to better serve New Yorkers.

Governor Hochul will direct the State's Office of Information Technology Services to issue a new policy, effective immediately, aimed at maximizing the opportunities AI presents for State government while remaining vigilant about evaluating risks, preserving privacy and protecting against unwanted outcomes.

The New York State Acceptable Use of Artificial Intelligence Policy establishes the principles and parameters by which state agencies can evaluate and utilize AI systems. Responsible use of these systems can help New Yorkers, including for example, matching people with jobs, providing accessibility tools, and identifying and mitigating cyber threats. Informed by a wide range of input, research, and expertise, the Policy serves as a tool to aid state agencies in the thoughtful evaluation and responsible adoption of AI technologies.

To ensure New York continues to adapt to this rapidly evolving field, Governor Hochul will also establish an interagency advisory working group that will convene regularly, stay on top of developments, and provide recommendations on adoption and use. The working group will also partner with SUNY and other educational institutions to share knowledge and exchange ideas on encouraging AI innovation and entrepreneurship in the state and developing the New York workforce, to create a more inclusive and prosperous New York.



## **SECTION 5: CREATING HOUSING TO DELIVER AFFORDABILITY**

Governor Hochul has made responding to New York’s affordability challenges a top priority for her administration. And there is no more substantial example of the increasing costs that New Yorkers face than the skyrocketing rise in housing costs, driven by a massive shortage of housing of all kinds — itself the result of a policy failure at both the state and local level, over decades, to meet the demand.

In 2022, Governor Hochul enacted the most ambitious housing capital plan in the State’s history, leveraging \$4.5 billion in State dollars, and \$25 billion overall, to create or preserve 100,000 units of affordable housing over five years.

Last year, Governor Hochul proposed a bold and comprehensive plan to respond to New York’s historic housing shortage by facilitating the building of 800,000 homes over the next decade. Governor Hochul’s plan would have encouraged annual housing growth of 1% per year downstate and one-third of 1% upstate, with a particular focus on spurring development around transit hubs which have benefited from billions of dollars of State investment. Unfortunately, the Legislature did not accept Governor Hochul’s Housing Compact or offer any equivalent strategy to adequately address severe deficits in housing supply.

Leaving aside the pressing need for a holistic plan to create sustainable housing growth, the Legislature has failed to act even to preserve New York’s anemic but existing rate of housing growth. Two sessions have now passed without the renewal or replacement of the 421-a program, the key tax abatement without which a large portion of rental construction in New York City is not economically viable. This threatens to make it impossible to return even to typical, pre-pandemic levels of housing construction in New York City.

Governor Hochul has had to exercise executive authority to fill the gaps created by legislative inaction, but the progress unlocked by that authority is not nearly sufficient to

meet the massive need. The Governor will again seek to collaborate with the Legislature on taking meaningful action to address the housing crisis. Her proposals focus on providing tools to the City of New York to spur housing development, using State assets to create additional supply, and taking on discrimination against tenants of affordable housing by both landlords and insurance companies – building on New York’s nation-leading tenant laws, which were recently strengthened by legislation signed by the Governor at the end of 2023.

### **Unlock Potential for New Housing**

#### *Make Pro-Housing Designation a Requirement of Key State Funding Programs*

In July 2023, Governor Hochul signed Executive Order 30 creating the Pro-Housing Community Program, designed to reward local governments that are working hard to address New York’s housing crisis and incentivize other localities to follow suit. Under the program, localities that achieve the “Pro-Housing Community” designation will receive priority in their applications for key discretionary funding programs, including the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI), the NY Forward program, the Regional Council Capital Fund, capital projects from the Market New York program, the New York Main Street program, the Long Island Investment Fund (LIIF), the Mid-Hudson Momentum Fund, and the Public Transportation Modernization Enhancement Program (MEP).

While Governor Hochul has noted that other states have found only limited success in spurring reforms of local housing policy through incentive programs, her Pro-Housing Community approach, involving existing programs and existing funds, enables the State to incentivize localities without incurring additional cost or spending money on changes that would have happened regardless of State involvement.

To provide even stronger incentives for communities to become proactive partners in building the housing necessary to support families and sustain affordability and growth, Governor Hochul will propose to adjust the eligibility criteria for local governments to access certain discretionary funding programs to make it a *requirement* that localities

obtain Pro-Housing certification. Along with ongoing State support for critical local infrastructure, such as sewers, this new requirement will strengthen the Pro Housing Community Program and truly test the question of whether an incentives-based approach can drive the change we need to increase housing supply or if stronger mechanisms are needed.

*Unlock the Potential for Up to 15,000 Units of Housing on State-Owned Sites*

Governor Hochul's Executive Order 30 also mandates that all state entities must review lands in their ownership and control to determine whether the sites could be used either for housing development or to support nearby housing developments.

In response to the Executive Order, nearly a dozen state agencies have identified publicly owned sites across New York State that could accommodate up to 15,000 new units of housing. In this year's budget, Governor Hochul will take actions to unlock these sites for much needed housing development. Most importantly, to assist in the repurposing of existing State sites and properties for use as housing, Governor Hochul will propose to establish a \$500 million fund to support infrastructure and other needs that are required to facilitate conversion. In this year's budget, Governor Hochul will take actions to unlock these transit adjacent lots, former prisons and other State sites for much needed housing development.

*Enact a Tax Abatement for New Rental and Affordable Housing in New York City*

Since the 1970s, the City of New York has utilized a tax abatement program, known as 421-a, to enable the construction of rental housing that would not otherwise be economically viable. Over time, the 421-a program came to include requirements to ensure that it would produce below-market housing, as well. In 2022, however, the 421-a program expired, and the Legislature rejected Governor Hochul's proposal to enact a new version of the program that would have required deeper, permanent levels of housing affordability.

In 2023, it became apparent that many housing developments started under the old 421-a program were in jeopardy as delays caused by the pandemic compromised their tax abatement and, in turn, their financing. Addressing this problem required an extension of the old program's completion deadline. In recognition of the pressing need to allow tens of thousands of already entitled projects to proceed in order to avoid losing out on the housing that they would yield, including affordable units, Governor Hochul proposed last year merely to extend the deadline for completion of projects that were started and financed under the old program. The Legislature declined to enact this extension.

Faced with the prospect of losing this housing already under way, Governor Hochul initiated a pilot program through Empire State Development, focused on developments in the area of the Gowanus rezoning, to provide equivalent benefits that would enable projects to proceed. In December, Governor Hochul announced that ESD had received 19 applications with the potential to secure 5,500 units of housing, including up to 1,400 affordable homes. This pilot program, however, is no substitute for a statutory extension of the old 421-a program's completion deadline, which should be a straightforward matter for the Legislature to enact and which the Governor will again propose in 2024. The extension will ensure that New York State does not lose out on housing across the city, including affordable units, that is already in progress and that the City is counting on to meet its affordability and supply needs.

The extension of the old program's completion deadline is a technical fix to a short-term problem. But for the Legislature not to replace 421-a with a new program poses an even greater threat to the long-term effort necessary to meet the pent-up and growing demand for housing in New York City and, in turn, New York State.

The 421-a program is a rental housing supply program, with affordability requirements that have created significant numbers of below-market units. Over the long term, in the absence of 421-a or a replacement program, housing construction overall will diminish substantially; the limited amount of new housing that does get built will include more condominiums and fewer rentals; and many below-market units, particularly in high-income communities, will not get built.

Indeed, an October 2023 report by the New York Building Congress found that new residential construction dropped by 62% in 2023, with the number of new units projected declining from 30,000 to 11,000.<sup>21</sup> While both an acceleration of new construction prior to the expiration of 421-a and a high interest rate environment have exacerbated the scale of the decline, there is no question that without a replacement for 421-a, New York City will not be able to return to pre-pandemic levels of housing creation. In other words, even if and when the economic environment becomes more favorable to development, without a tax abatement program, rental housing construction will slow to a crawl.

That is why, once again, Governor Hochul will propose to enact legislation, sought by the City of New York, to allow the City to offer a tax abatement for rental construction. The tax abatement will need to contain requirements pertaining to below-market housing and to wage standards for both building service and construction workers.

*Give the City of New York the Flexibility to Increase Residential Capacity*

For decades, the State has imposed a limitation on residential density in New York City, which restricts maximum density of residential development to a floor area ratio of 12.0. Over the last two years, Governor Hochul proposed legislation to remove this antiquated limitation. With the City of New York's support, the Governor will again propose to return to the City the ability to undertake local land use review processes to allow for denser residential development where appropriate.

*Provide an Incentive for Below-Market Housing in Office Conversions*

Last year, Governor Hochul proposed legislation to facilitate the City of New York's efforts to convert underused commercial buildings into new residential housing. It was a way of addressing two critical problems at once: the growing need for new residential housing and the economic impact of the pandemic, and the related changing landscape of remote work on New York City's commercial real estate stock. At the time, it was estimated that the

Governor’s proposal would make an estimated additional 120 million square feet newly eligible for conversion. When Governor Hochul’s proposal was not passed into law, the City undertook to achieve the same goals through local action.

But the City cannot enact incentives to encourage the inclusion of below-market housing in the commercial conversions it is now allowing through local efforts without action in Albany. With the City’s support, Governor Hochul will propose legislation to enact a tax incentive that would be available to commercial conversions that include below-market housing.

### *Streamline Regulatory Processes to Increase Housing Production*

At Governor Hochul’s direction, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has begun its process to identify efficiencies in its State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) regulations, including to promote environmentally friendly housing growth while maintaining critical protections for all communities. DEC is poised to commence stakeholder outreach in the beginning of this year. The Department of State (DOS) has adopted SEQR regulations that conform to DEC SEQR regulations and relate to variances for certain housing under the Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code and State Energy Conservation Construction Code.

## **Stand Up for Tenants and Homeowners**

### *Authorize the City of New York to Create a Path for Legalization of Basement Apartments*

Following the devastation wrought by Hurricane Ida, it was clear to all that there was an urgent need to create a pathway to legalize basement dwellings currently barred by law, bringing these homes out of the shadows. Last year, Governor Hochul proposed providing the City of New York with the local authority to provide amnesty by local law for existing basement units that meet health and safety standards to be determined by the City. The need has not changed, and the threat to New Yorkers’ safety posed by the status quo

remains. Governor Hochul will again propose giving the City of New York the authority it seeks regarding basements and cellars.

### *Protect Section 8 Tenants from Voucher Discrimination*

Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers enable the lowest-income households in New York State to rent or purchase decent, safe housing in the private housing market by providing federal rental and homeownership assistance. It is against state law for a housing provider or a real estate professional to discriminate against an individual seeking housing because of their use of a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher, or any other lawful source of income. Nevertheless, such discrimination still occurs frequently and impacts many low-income families' ability to find safe and decent housing. Existing legal processes allow for restitution in due course to individuals who have experienced unlawful discrimination, but do not offer immediate assistance to those seeking a home.

To help Section 8 voucher holders overcome illegal discrimination and access housing with their federal subsidy, Governor Hochul is directing the Division of Human Rights, in partnership with New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), to launch a new enforcement unit dedicated to swift resolution of complaints about housing discrimination related to Section 8 vouchers.

### *Prohibit Insurance Companies from Refusing to Cover Affordable Housing*

Below-market housing often faces greater difficulty securing reasonably priced insurance than market-rate housing. The Department of Financial Services (DFS), in cooperation with HCR, published a report last November that found that affordable housing premiums had increased by 43% between 2019 and 2021, with some insurers simply refusing to cover affordable housing with tenants who receive government assistance (e.g., Section 8 vouchers).<sup>22</sup> An October 2023 survey of 418 housing providers across the United States similarly found that over 93% of housing providers needed to take action to mitigate cost

increases due to higher premiums, with 29% of surveyed providers having seen more than 25% increases in premiums.<sup>23</sup>

Affordable housing is particularly sensitive to higher insurance costs given that rents are fixed or subject to limited increases. Higher premium costs for affordable housing can be passed on to tenants or result in decreases in services or building maintenance and repairs. In this way, high premiums or lack of insurance can keep affordable housing from being built or preserved.

Currently, there is not a clear prohibition against insurers refusing to cover or charging higher premiums to affordable housing.

Governor Hochul will propose legislation that will make it unlawful for insurance carriers to inquire about or consider tenants' source of income, the existence of affordable dwelling units, or the receipt of governmental housing assistance in the decision to issue or continue to provide insurance for residential real property. The bill would further make it unlawful for insurance carriers to increase insurance premiums on the basis of source of income, the existence of affordable dwelling units, or the receipt of governmental housing assistance.



## SECTION 6: IMPROVING MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH

In New York, rates of maternal mortality have historically been high, with the state not so long ago ranking among the worst in the nation. In the years since the Maternal Mortality Review Initiative was established, rates have improved. However, New York still ranks 15<sup>th</sup> out of all 37 reporting states nationwide on maternal mortality.<sup>24</sup> A woman's chance of dying as a result of pregnancy is *more than twice* as high in New York as in California, which has the lowest maternal mortality rate in the nation.

Tragically, the vast majority – some 78% – of pregnancy-related deaths in New York are preventable, and, as is the case for infant mortality, racial and ethnic disparities remain unacceptably high.<sup>25</sup> Black mothers are overrepresented among pregnancy-related deaths, accounting for 14.3% of all births in 2018 but more than half (51%) of maternal deaths. Black mothers are five times more likely to die from pregnancy than white mothers and are also more likely to experience complications.<sup>26</sup>

Every year, hundreds of families in New York experience the loss of a child in infancy. These losses, many preventable, are profound both for individual families and their communities, and they are disproportionately felt by Black parents. Indeed, infant mortality among children born to Black women is 2.8 times higher than it is for children born to white women. Between 2016 and 2019, rates of infant mortality among Black infants rose even as rates fell for all other racial/ethnic groups.<sup>27</sup> As of 2021, New York's infant mortality rate stood at 4.16 per 1,000 live births.<sup>28</sup> However, provisional data released by the CDC show the rate ticked up to 4.26 in 2022, marking the second consecutive year that the rate increased.<sup>29</sup> This comes amid the news that infant mortality nationwide has increased for the first time in two decades.

Under Governor Hochul's leadership, New York has taken significant steps forward to address maternal and infant mortality. In recognition of the importance of continuity of

care and of the risks of infant and maternal deaths beyond the initial postpartum period, health insurance coverage has been extended a full year after the end of pregnancy for Medicaid and Child Health Plus enrollees. As of January 1, 2024, New York joined only a handful of states in providing Medicaid coverage for doula care, and Governor Hochul signed legislation directing the Department of Health to establish and maintain a directory of doulas — measures that will increase access to these services proven to improve birth and maternal health outcomes.

However, the number of preventable deaths underscores there is more work to do, and in 2024, Governor Hochul will advance a comprehensive plan to further increase access to quality care during the pre- and post-natal period, including mental health care, while also addressing other risk factors for infant and maternal mortality.

### **Increase Access to Pre-Natal Care**

#### *Establish First-in-Nation Statewide Paid Pre-Natal Leave*

Data show that early and regular access to pre-natal care improves the odds of having a healthy pregnancy. Compared with infants born to mothers who received pre-natal care, infants whose mothers did not receive pre-natal care were three times more likely to have a low birth weight and five times more likely to die in infancy.<sup>30</sup> Women who do not receive pre-natal care are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than those who do receive care.<sup>31</sup>

Pregnant workers who need to take time off from work for pre-natal appointments have limited paid options available, and what options do exist can be quickly exhausted, especially by those most at risk of poor pregnancy outcomes. To ensure cost is not a barrier to attending pre-natal appointments and address inequities in access to this vital care, Governor Hochul will propose legislation to expand New York State's Paid Family Leave program to cover 40 hours of additional paid leave for pre-natal medical appointments, establishing the nation's first statewide paid pre-natal leave benefit. New York led the nation when it passed its Paid Family Leave law in 2016, and can lead the nation again by

becoming the first state to provide a paid benefit specifically for access to pre-natal medical appointments.

#### *Require Informed Consent to Drug Test in Pregnancy or Postpartum*

The practice of drug testing pregnant people and newborns deters some pregnant New Yorkers from accessing the pre-natal and post-natal care needed to ensure a healthy pregnancy. And the effects of the threat of a toxicology test differ across racial lines. Compared to white mothers and infants, Black mothers and infants are more likely to be tested, exacerbating inequities in pregnancy as well as life trajectories. To address this barrier to accessing critical care and build more trust in health care providers, Governor Hochul will propose legislation to require that providers obtain consent from individuals who are pregnant or recently gave birth prior to drug testing, as recommended by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG).

### **Create Conditions for Better Outcomes**

#### *Issue a Standing Order to Increase Access to Doula Services*

Last year, Governor Hochul took bold action to expand doula coverage for all Medicaid beneficiaries statewide, a critical step toward addressing significant disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes. To further expand access and ensure New Yorkers can avail themselves of these services as readily as possible, Governor Hochul will propose legislation to enable the Commissioner of Health to issue a standing order allowing New Yorkers to access doula services without the current requirement of a recommendation from a physician.

#### *Establish New Oversight Mechanisms to Avoid Unnecessary C-Sections*

Some doctors in New York perform Cesarean births, or C-sections, more frequently than clinical best practices would recommend, including utilizing C-sections in an outsized share

of low-risk pregnancies. While this may be done for a variety of reasons, one contributing factor is that it can be more profitable for a provider to perform a C-section, even when doing so is not necessary for the patient. To address this issue, Governor Hochul has directed the Department of Health to launch new initiatives to reduce the rate of unnecessary C-sections. This will include new oversight measures to identify physicians whose behavior is out of line with clinical best practices, allowing the Department to hold providers – including those overutilizing C-sections – accountable. It also includes a new Medicaid financial incentive for hospitals to reduce the number of unnecessary C-sections.

#### *Reduce Barrier Costs for Pregnant Patients*

Even for New Yorkers with robust health insurance coverage, co-pays and other cost-sharing are significant barriers that prevent pregnant and postpartum individuals from getting the care they need. While the approximately 7 million New Yorkers on Medicaid already benefit from low to no cost sharing, approximately 1.3 million New Yorkers enrolled in the Essential Plan and Qualified Health Plans still face cost barriers to accessing routine pregnancy-related care. To further ensure that cost is not a barrier to accessing the care New Yorkers need to have a healthy pregnancy, the State will eliminate cost sharing for most pre-natal and postpartum pregnancy-related care in both the Essential Plan and Qualified Health Plans. The Essential Plan will also add coverage for doula services.

#### *Reduce the Risk Of Sudden Unexpected Infant Deaths (SUID)*

Sleep-related deaths are the most common type of preventable child fatalities that come to the attention of state officials, accounting for about a third of deaths among infants after the first month of life. Each week, roughly two infants die in an unsafe sleep setting, resulting in more than 120 infant deaths per year. Sometimes this is due to a lack of access to safety-approved cribs.

Given that safe sleep environments are crucial for reducing the risk of sleep-related deaths, Governor Hochul will provide funding for the distribution of portable cribs for under-resourced New Yorkers at no cost. The cribs will be available to families via local departments of social services and other local organizations. Medical professionals at birthing hospitals will also facilitate referrals where a need for a crib is identified.

*Develop Data-Driven Interventions to Improve Birth Equity*

The State is committed to using data-driven approaches to inform efforts to reduce infant and maternal mortality. The Department of Health will establish new reporting requirements for Medicaid managed care plans to give the State better insight into patients' utilization of critical pre-natal and postpartum services to better target interventions. Additionally, the Department of Health will work with birthing hospitals and centers, through the Perinatal Quality Collaborative, to develop racially-sensitive and culturally-sensitive birth equity improvement plans based on the results and assessment of their Patient Reported Experience Measure (PREM) surveys. Finally, the Department of Health will convene regional stakeholder groups to develop recommendations to better target efforts to reduce infant mortality.

**Improve Maternal Mental Health**

*Expand Mental Health Screenings*

The most recent maternal mortality review report determined that every maternal death in New York due to mental health conditions was preventable. The same report noted that inadequate screening and assessment of mental health conditions was among the leading contributing factors to pregnancy-related deaths. To better identify and treat mental health conditions in pregnancy and throughout the postpartum period, the Department of Health, in consultation with the Office of Mental Health, will increase access to comprehensive mental health screening tools.

*Strengthen 988 Counseling for Pregnant New Yorkers and New Parents*

To ensure that pregnant and postpartum New Yorkers have immediate access to counselors equipped to help them navigate mental health challenges, the Office of Mental Health will create a specialized training for 988 providers related to maternal mental health issues, increasing overall acumen and competence in triaging this population.

*Train Providers to Recognize and Treat Mental Health Conditions*

Gaps in provider knowledge are the most common contributing factor to pregnancy-related deaths at the provider level, followed by inadequate assessment of mental health conditions. Filling these gaps and, specifically, building the capacity of providers to better identify mental health conditions could save lives.

Project TEACH Maternal Mental Health offers training to general psychiatrists who may not have expertise in maternal mental health to increase treatment efficacy. Funding will be provided to expand Project TEACH Maternal Mental Health to include therapists, lactation consultants, WIC staff, home visiting nurses, and other frontline practitioners working with pregnant and postpartum New Yorkers. This will provide a warmline for anyone working with a perinatal individual to access expert consultation and get mental health support.

## **SECTION 7: GETTING BACK TO BASICS ON READING**

Governor Hochul believes that taking care of our children is a primary imperative of government. Every child deserves a high-quality education that instills knowledge, nurtures confidence, and establishes a path to success. To ensure the State is supporting its students and schools, Governor Hochul has directed unprecedented resources and support into early and primary education.

Foundation Aid, the State’s main education operating aid formula, allocates State funds equitably to school districts based on student need, community wealth, and regional cost differences. For 16 years, however, the Foundation Aid formula was not fully funded. Under Governor Hochul’s leadership, that changed: New York State achieved full phase-in of the Foundation Aid formula for the first time in the current school year. Last year, Governor Hochul’s second budget allocated \$34.5 billion in total School Aid – the highest level in history.

Efforts to improve student success must prioritize literacy, a crucial foundation for education. Many children face challenges in achieving proficient reading skills by the third grade, a critical milestone linked to future success. Failure to attain proficiency by this stage increases the risk of students dropping out, especially students of color and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Early reading proficiency is vital, as it significantly influences a student’s academic path, impacting future earnings, health, and overall well-being.<sup>32</sup>

To help students and teachers succeed in reading, Governor Hochul is advancing her comprehensive “Back to Basics” plan to ensure that all students and teachers have the resources they need to both learn and teach to the best of their ability.

### **Ensure Instructional Best Practices in Districts Around the State**

Governor Hochul’s “Back to Basics” reading plan takes statewide action to ensure that every school district utilizes instructional best practices grounded in the Science of Reading. The Science of Reading is an evidence-based approach to reading instruction that prioritizes proven techniques to help students learn and love to read. The Science of Reading relies on cognitive research that unpacks how students process phonics and the relationship between language and the written word. It is not a specific curriculum, but instead a holistic approach to reading instruction involving phonics, phonemic awareness, decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension. While the Science of Reading is grounded in modern, best-in-class academic research, it relies on time-tested and evidence-based techniques.

Despite academic consensus on the efficacy of a Science of Reading approach to literacy, there are school districts that continue to rely on outdated and discredited approaches to reading instruction. These approaches, most closely associated with the “Balanced Literacy” school of reading instruction, fail to give all our students the tools they need to become confident and proficient readers. Recognizing the urgent need to improve reading proficiency and ensure student success, more than 30 states have transitioned to a “back-to-basics” approach rooted in the Science of Reading.

To ensure that students and teachers have access to the best, most effective tools, Governor Hochul will seek passage this year of legislation to require that the State Education Department (SED) promulgate instructional best practices in reading instruction, and that school districts adopt those practices. This approach includes teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension. By September of 2025, all school districts will need to certify with SED that their curriculum, instructional strategies, and teacher professional development align with all elements of the instructional best practices.

Additionally, SED, along with an array of stakeholders, has been tapped to participate in the Hunt Institute Path Forward program. A State Action Plan, to be finalized by the end of 2024, will aim to transform early literacy instruction in New York State by embedding the Science of Reading into educator preparation.



### **Fund Training for 20,000 Teachers in Effective Reading Instruction**

Every day, teachers across the state pour their lives into supporting their students and instilling a love of reading. Their work makes a tangible difference in their students' lives and ensures a brighter future for New York State's economy and civic life.

To help further equip teachers with the resources they need, Governor Hochul is providing \$10 million for teacher training programs to ensure teachers are prepared to utilize evidence-based reading standards in the classroom. The New York State United Teachers and the United Federation Teachers have already begun training thousands of teachers in the Science of Reading, and this funding will support the training of 20,000 additional teachers and elementary school teaching assistants.

### **Expand Access to Science of Reading Instruction Credentials at SUNY and CUNY**

SUNY and CUNY have a major role to play in helping train the next generation of teachers in effective literacy approaches and helping existing teachers supplement their professional development. Governor Hochul will expand access to micro-credentialing programs for teachers focused on the Science of Reading at SUNY and CUNY to better prepare the current and future educational workforce.

## **SECTION 8: EXTENDING OPPORTUNITY TO OUR STUDENTS**

The State University of New York (SUNY) and the City University of New York (CUNY) are two of the most effective engines of mobility in the nation, and they are engines of opportunity for young people across New York State. That’s why Governor Hochul has directed historic levels of support to SUNY and CUNY, helping both institutions invest in their physical and academic infrastructure and support academic excellence. Last year’s budget included \$2.4 billion in capital funding for SUNY and CUNY, as well as establishing the first-ever matching fund for contributions made to the endowments of SUNY’s four university centers: Buffalo, Stony Brook, Albany, and Binghamton.

This year, Governor Hochul will launch an array of initiatives to continue building on the success of SUNY and CUNY and ensure that all of New York’s students can reach their fullest potential.

### **Automatically Admit High Achieving Students from Top 10 Percent of High School Classes to SUNY and CUNY Campuses**

To ensure that more of New York’s home-grown, high-achieving students attend our outstanding public colleges, Governor Hochul is launching an ambitious plan to offer direct admission to the top graduates in every high school to New York’s public higher education system. Allowing for automatic university admissions of our most talented students within the top 10 percent of their classes would both advance equity and help retain the best and brightest within New York State and its higher education institutions.

There is substantial evidence that high-achieving, low-income students apply to, and end up attending, less selective postsecondary institutions at higher rates than their higher-income peers. Several states, including Texas, California, Illinois, and Idaho, already offer

direct admissions, and have found that this policy advances equity in their university systems. In California, for example, where students must also complete a college-ready curriculum to be eligible for the UC system, the admissions guarantee increased enrollment in selective universities for underrepresented students, increased graduation rates, and increased post-graduation earnings.

If college-ready students from the top 10 percent of each high school are guaranteed direct admission to one or more selective and in-demand SUNY campuses, New York can help ensure that students of all backgrounds have the opportunity to pursue degrees at top-tier institutions. Over the next year, SUNY will develop a direct admissions program that can reach across the state and help more students achieve their potential. SUNY will work with school districts and stakeholders to create a seamless system that can identify college-ready, eligible students from the top 10 percent of their class and send acceptance letters directly to their door.

With the same intention of helping to reduce barriers to higher education for students who might be otherwise deterred from, CUNY will work to further its mission of extending opportunity to students of all backgrounds by developing a direct admissions program aimed at high achieving students within the top 10 percent of their classes.

Combined, these actions will serve to increase equity among New York students and encourage postsecondary matriculation. This policy will also retain New York's brightest students in-state, which will help boost our postsecondary enrollment, and, ultimately, help secure New York's economic future.

### **Make FAFSA Completion Universal**

New York State is a national leader on college affordability. SUNY and CUNY tuition is among the lowest in the country. 53% of SUNY's full-time resident undergraduate students graduate from college tuition-free after state and federal financial aid, and nearly half graduate with no federal debt. At CUNY, as many as 66% of full-time undergraduate students graduate tuition-free. New York has several financial aid programs, such as the

Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) and the Excelsior Scholarship, which, combined with federal financial aid programs, allow many students the opportunity to obtain an affordable, high-quality college education. However, for eligible students to take advantage of these crucial programs, they must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

The FAFSA is an important part of the college application process, as it maximizes access to financial aid to support postsecondary educational costs including tuition, fees, books, room, and board. Research also shows that high school seniors who complete the FAFSA are far more likely to go to college directly after graduation than those who do not. For high school students in the lowest socioeconomic quintile, FAFSA completion is correlated with a 127% increase in immediate postsecondary enrollment.

States such as Texas, Louisiana, and California have required that students complete the FAFSA to graduate high school. These states have seen impressive results. In Louisiana, FAFSA completion increased by nearly 26% in 2018, the first year this graduation requirement was in place. The state effectively closed the gap in FAFSA completion between low-income and high-income school districts – with now nearly equal completion rates.

In order to increase college-going and improve college affordability, Governor Hochul will propose legislation to require school districts to ensure that every high school senior completes the FAFSA or the NYS Dream Act application (or, in the alternative, signs a waiver form indicating that they are aware of, but choose not to fill out, the FAFSA). All individual students will still be able to graduate regardless of whether they complete the FAFSA. This initiative will ensure that every New York student has access to the full breadth of their financial aid options and opportunities for future success.

### **Broaden SNAP Enrollment Outreach at CUNY and SUNY**

According to a national survey from 2019, 39% of students at two-year colleges and 29% of students at four-year colleges faced food insecurity. Between 1996 and 2016, the

percentage of college students below 130% of the poverty line rose 32%—to nearly two out of every five enrolled students—and these numbers are even higher at public institutions like SUNY and CUNY.

Importantly, a study conducted at a public university in California demonstrated that enrolling in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which can provide recipients hundreds of dollars each month to pay for food and groceries, was associated with a significant boost in retention rates among students. Despite this, many college students who may be eligible for SNAP are not enrolled. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) notes that just 40% of the 3.3 million low-income students currently eligible are enrolled, compared to 85% of the generally eligible population. In addition, the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice found that in 2021, 52% of students facing basic needs insecurity did not apply for public benefits because “they did not know how.”

This summer, SUNY created an easy online solution to generate the enrollment form needed to apply for SNAP benefits, which was launched for student use this fall. SUNY has selected Benefits Data Trust, a national nonprofit organization with expertise in connecting eligible populations, including students with public benefits, to assess the current state of SUNY’s targeted outreach activities and benefits access initiatives and identify opportunities to conduct data-driven outreach system-wide. SUNY and Benefits Data Trust are working together to pilot the implementation of BDT’s SNAP toolkit to help SUNY identify students eligible for multiple public assistance programs including SNAP, launch targeted outreach campaigns, track results, and generate replication recommendations on five community college campuses: Finger Lakes Community College, Monroe Community College, Orange County Community College, Schenectady Community College, and Westchester Community College.

CUNY recently launched a three-year demonstration project for CUNY CARES (Comprehensive Access to Resources for Essential Services), an initiative at the three CUNY colleges in the Bronx that is testing a new model of integrated, student-

centered services to meet the needs of CUNY students for food security, housing stability, and access to health care and mental health services. A key goal of this three-year demonstration project (2023-2025) is to assist every student eligible for SNAP to enroll.

At the Governor's direction, SUNY and CUNY will take the lessons learned from these efforts and expand SNAP outreach to all SUNY and CUNY campuses so that students can take full advantage of the support they are eligible for.

### **Increase Campus Voter Participation**

In the 2020 election, the college student voter participation rate was 66%. However, New York State's college student voter participation rate was lower than the national average, at 62.5%. Thirty SUNY campuses and seven CUNY campuses are currently participating in the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. This challenge requires increasing student voter participation on campus, developing a working group of campus professionals and participating in the National Study of Learning Voting and Engagement (NSLVE). In New York State, students are allowed to register to vote at their college address, and in 2022, Governor Hochul signed a law requiring polling places to be located on more college and university campuses around the state.

This year, Governor Hochul will ensure increased voter participation efforts on college campuses throughout the state. Specifically, the Governor will drive efforts at SUNY to include information in residence packets when students apply for on-campus housing about how to change a voter registration address if students wish to do so, as well as information about how to vote. CUNY will continue to provide voter information during new student orientations and provide a variety of notifications to students about key election dates, including voter registration and absentee application deadlines, by utilizing e-blasts and social media messaging.

SUNY and CUNY will include voter registration links on their student portals, and send notifications as the voter registration deadline approaches. The Governor will also encourage all colleges in the state to participate in nonpartisan get-out-the-vote messaging,

including a focus on alleviating various barriers to student voting, such as change of address issues.

These changes will ensure that more New Yorkers, including college students, are able to exercise their right to vote.

## **SECTION 9: STRENGTHENING SERVICE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

Service to our communities is a core New York value. Every day, volunteers and civic-minded New Yorkers donate their time, their talents, and their money toward caring for the vulnerable, supporting our children, and lifting up our communities.

Bridging communities through service has never been more essential than in this current moment. The United States Surgeon General has deemed loneliness a public health crisis of the highest priority. Governor Hochul's appointment of Dr. Ruth Westheimer as New York's honorary Ambassador to Loneliness is in recognition of the pernicious effects loneliness has on health and mental wellbeing. Service helps both volunteers and the communities they work with forge stronger ties.

Indeed, as hatred and division continue to reach for a foothold in our communities, service offers an opportunity for New Yorkers to make a difference. Connection and community are the ultimate antidote for incivility and hate.

Governor Hochul believes that New York can take inspiration from the service work happening across the state and build out new opportunities for service that will change the lives of both volunteers and the people they touch.

### **Create a Statewide Service Initiative Under the Leadership of the Lieutenant Governor**

In recognition of the vital role service plays in the lives of New Yorkers, Governor Hochul is tasking Lieutenant Governor Delgado to champion a service and civic engagement initiative across the state.



Lieutenant Governor Delgado will take a leadership role in identifying and fostering service opportunities. To coordinate with the wide scope of service organizations, the Lieutenant Governor will launch and lead a new Office of Service and Civic Engagement. The Office will be headed by a newly appointed Chief Service Officer, who will report directly to Lieutenant Governor Delgado. The Chief Service Officer will lead service and civic engagement efforts across the state. This model has been used to drive positive outcomes in service across other states.

Over the next year, the Office of Service and Civic Engagement will leverage partnerships and resources, including the State's Commission on National and Community Service, to build out a holistic action plan to connect more New Yorkers, particularly our youth, to service opportunities.

To launch the Lieutenant Governor's service initiative, New York will found an inaugural class of the Empire State Service Corps Program in partnership with the State University of New York. Modeled after the California College Corps, the Empire State Service Program will provide paid work opportunities to college students as a way of serving their community.

Participating college students will commit to perform necessary community service work for 300 hours a year, such as tutoring in high-need K-12 schools, distributing meals to those facing food insecurity, and taking climate action.

The City University of New York (CUNY) hosts a CUNY Service Corps program where students are able to intern at nonprofits and government agencies. Since the program's launch, CUNY Service Corps members have completed over 1,000,000 hours of service to NYC at over 150 nonprofits and government agencies in all 5 boroughs.

In line with the Lieutenant Governor's service initiative, CUNY will seek to enhance its paid internships with nonprofits in the New York City region to students seeking to gain invaluable workplace experience while in service with their communities.

## **SECTION 10: EXPANDING SWIMMING ACCESS AND SAFETY**

Our beaches, pools, and waterways are among our most vital and democratizing spaces, allowing families across New York State the opportunity to splash, swim, relax, exercise, cool down, and share in the joy of being connected to the water.

Unfortunately, disparate access to safe and convenient opportunities for swimming has denied far too many New Yorkers the chance to engage with the water and learn foundational water safety skills. Drownings in New York State have reached record highs in recent years, claiming the lives of 230 New Yorkers in 2021. Drowning now ranks as the leading cause of death among one to four-year-olds across the United States, and the second-leading cause of death for children aged 5 to 14.<sup>33</sup> A Red Cross survey found that “only slightly more than half of Americans can perform all of the 5 basic skills that could save their life in the water.”<sup>34</sup>

The risk of drowning is not shared equally across racial demographics. According to data from the CDC, younger Black adolescents are more than three times as likely to drown as their white peers; Native American and Alaskan Native young adults are twice as likely to drown as white Americans.<sup>35</sup> Black people under the age of 30 are on average 1.5 times more likely to drown than their white counterparts. According to the CDC, “[i]n swimming pools, Black children ages 10-14 years drown at rates 7.6 times higher than White children.”<sup>36</sup>

Without equitable and widespread access to safe swimming opportunities, fewer people will develop foundational swimming and water safety skills, more people will swim in unsafe waterways without lifeguards, and more preventable drowning deaths will continue to occur each year.

To prevent drownings and promote greater access to New York’s pools, seaside beaches, lakes, and rivers, Governor Hochul is launching an ambitious agenda to safely connect more

New York families to the water – NY SWIMS: the New York Statewide Investment in More Swimming.

### **Invest in Swimming Infrastructure**

Under Governor Hochul’s leadership, New York will embark on a program of pool construction unrivaled since the New Deal, when FDR made public pools – including 11 pools opened over one summer in New York City alone – a centerpiece of the Work Progress Administration.

New York’s pool construction ambitions can be divided into four areas of focus: a centerpiece \$60 million capital grant fund to build out 10 new landmark public swimming pools in underserved communities, a \$60 million fund to develop and install innovative floating pools that can inspire new engagement with our waterways, a \$30 million fund to deploy pop-up above ground pools to combat extreme heat, and new investment in New York’s State Parks to reverse decades of disinvestment.

#### *Build Municipal Pools in High Needs Areas*

NY SWIMS, overseen by State Parks and administered by the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY), will create a competitive \$60 million grant program to facilitate the renovation and construction of pools in high-need neighborhoods across the State. Through NY SWIMS, localities can apply for grants of up to \$10 million for public pool projects. NY SWIMS grants can be used to fund the design and construction/renovation of swimming pools as well as other related capital expenses, including site infrastructure, splash pads, diving boards and slides, bathrooms and changing rooms, concessions, land acquisition, and other features that create value for local communities. To address equity gaps, all projects must be in or within a 1.5-mile radius of an economically distressed census tract within the same municipality.

*Connect New Yorkers to Our Rivers and Lakes*

To help reimagine how New Yorkers can engage with the water, including our rivers and lakes, New York will create pathways and funding opportunities to encourage real innovation in swimming infrastructure.

Governor Hochul will provide \$60 million in competitive grant funding to municipalities for the deployment of innovative, floating pools that can allow New Yorkers to safely swim in natural bodies of water. To help ensure floating pools meet all appropriate public health standards, the New York State Department of Health will provide guidance that will allow organizations to test the feasibility of innovative swimming pool designs within the state's natural waters.

In addition, New York State and New York City will collaborate on launching +Pool, a state-of-the-art swimming facility which would be moored in the waters surrounding New York City. The State and City will jointly fund a +Pool demonstration project that will be tested in the summer of 2024 and opened to the public in the following year.

*Fund Pop-Up Pools in Response to Extreme Heat*

To combat ever hotter summer temperatures and help directly integrate swimming opportunities into urban environments, Governor Hochul is also establishing a municipal grant program to fund smaller, pop-up swimming pools.

Pools may range in size from larger installations such as the temporary pools that have operated over the past five years at Brooklyn Bridge Park, to smaller mobile pools that can sit on street surfaces and can be dispatched to block parties, parks, events, or open spaces.

As recommended by New York State's Extreme Heat Action Plan Work Group, access to outdoor cooling opportunities is vital for disadvantaged communities and high-risk populations that do not have access to indoor cooling, and this program will help meet that need.

The grant program will be structured to encourage real innovation and creativity in how temporary pools are designed and deployed.

*Make Waves for the Parks Centennial: New York's Swim-Tennial Celebration*

In 1924, New York State established the State Council of Parks and funded the creation of a statewide park system. Today, our Parks system welcomes more than 79 million visitors each year. In the face of climate change and rising temperatures, increasing public demand, and unequal access to parks, the centennial marks a fitting moment for a renewed commitment to New York's State Parks.

In time to celebrate the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (State Parks) Centennial, Governor Hochul will advance a historic set of investments into public swimming facilities – reversing a long-term trend of cuts in swimming that led to decades of closures and cutbacks. Significant investments will be made in the following facilities:

- Restoring Harriman State Park's Lake Sebago Beach, which has been closed since 2011 due to damage from Hurricane Irene. Through this massive restoration project, visitors and hikers alike can soon seek refuge to cool down and once again go swimming at Lake Sebago.
- Jones Beach East Bathhouse, the last major piece of iconic and historic Jones Beach State Park infrastructure not yet touched by the revitalization of the past 10 years, will be redesigned and reimagined for future generations to enjoy. This project will convert an abandoned pool complex into a destination spray park, introducing and incorporating a unique Learn to Swim feature to help children and inexperienced swimmers stay safe in a smaller, controlled environment.
- Sojourner Truth State Park was once the site of cement production, brick making, quarrying, and ice harvesting. The property has since been transformed into New

York's newest park. Now, the park will be expanded to include a floating swim structure in the Quarry Lake.

## **Improve Safety in the Water**

### *Provide More Lifeguards and Swimming Instruction*

To address the shortage of lifeguards that is a significant constraint on the provision of safe swim time, the State will offer a grant program to reimburse municipalities for expenses related to lifeguard compensation to help expand operating hours, increase staffing levels for swim programs, and widen access to public beaches and pools throughout New York State.

### *Double State Parks Water-Safety Instruction Opportunities*

Learning to swim is an important skill for all ages and greatly reduces the future risk of drowning. To increase access to swim lessons, Governor Hochul will direct State Parks to more than double the number of pools and beaches that offer water safety instruction programs. These swimming instruction programs will be provided by State Park lifeguards with options for all ages and levels.

### *Getting Kids to the Pool*

New York will partner with municipalities to assist with locating additional swimming facilities to utilize for aquatic swim instruction. State Parks will work to transport students and their families to facilities where swimming is offered through the Connect Kids programs.

### *Making SUNY Pools Community Anchors*

SUNY campuses are community centers in many areas around the state, and currently include 39 operational indoor swimming pools. Governor Hochul will direct SUNY to collaborate with schools, youth and community-based organizations, and municipalities to increase learn-to-swim opportunities across every region of the state. In addition, SUNY will incentivize more skilled swimmers to become lifeguards by helping defray the cost of the lifeguard certification exam and will phase in giving college credit for lifeguard training courses.

*Increase Amenities at Pools and Beaches by Providing Free Sunscreen*

Sunscreen is a crucial tool for protecting our skin from the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays, which can cause sunburns and even skin cancer. Skin cancer affects one in five Americans and is responsible for half of all cancer cases in the United States, making it the most common type of cancer in the country. While most people recognize its importance, access to sunscreen isn't always equal. Governor Hochul will address this issue by launching a pilot program offering free sunscreen at State Parks' pools, to help families and swimmers stay safe in the sun and enjoy the outdoors.

## **SECTION 11: PROTECTING NEW YORKERS FROM EXTREME WEATHER**

Over the past year, New York has faced an onslaught of drenching rain, furious storms, sweltering heat, wildfire smoke, and bitter cold – all examples of severe weather that has severely damaged our infrastructure, disrupted daily routines, and exacted enormous economic and health damage to our state:

- A once-in-a-thousand-year rainfall flooded the Hudson Valley with more than nine inches of rain and inflicted tens of millions of dollars in damage.
- Buffalo endured an unprecedented end-of-year 2022 snowfall, including suffering through the longest non-mountaintop blizzard ever recorded within the U.S.
- New York was suffocated by smothering wildfire smoke that descended from Canada, resulting in the worst air quality recorded since the 1960s.
- Downstate saw rainfall on 14 out of the 30 days of September, culminating in a storm that dropped a month’s worth of rain in just three hours and swamped New York City.
- An unseasonable three-day heatwave in September broke 40-year-old temperature records on Long Island.

These events are not anomalies. Instead, they represent a “new normal” of extreme weather that is a result of climate change. New York State has warmed more rapidly than the national average and that trend is expected to continue. A rapidly warming climate has put coastal states like New York on the front lines of climate change.

New York’s increasing vulnerability to extreme weather puts lives, homes, infrastructure, and our economy at risk. While the State continues to make important progress to reduce the emissions that cause climate change, setting an example for the nation and the world,



New York simultaneously needs to fortify against future storms, build more resilient communities, and adapt to a warming world.

### **Protect Our Homes**

Research demonstrates that large swaths of New York are already susceptible to climate damage. According to the First Street Foundation, more than 615,000 properties across the state are at risk of flooding; significantly more than the 376,000 properties accounted for in current Federal Emergency Management Agency flood maps.

As a result, tremendous amounts of invaluable real estate and infrastructure are within reach of rising seas. New York City alone is anticipated to see a 302% increase in average annual losses due to storm damage by 2053, and already has upwards of \$176 billion in property value (accounting for \$2 billion yearly property tax contributions) sitting within the current 100-year floodplain.

#### *Launch the Resilient and Ready Program to Fortify and Repair Homes at Risk*

New York State's ability to quickly provide support to the victims of flooding has been severely constrained by inaction on the part of the federal government, including the denial of individual assistance for homeowners after extreme weather events such as recent historic flooding in the Hudson Valley, and limitations on the use of state resources. As a result, the State has not been able to provide the full, needed support to communities left reeling in the wake of disaster.

That is why Governor Hochul is proposing the Resilient & Ready Program to create a flexible fund that will be used to fortify our housing stock and other critical infrastructure, particularly in flood-prone communities, by supporting resiliency efforts for low-and-moderate income homeowners ahead of future storms. At the same time, it will enable Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) to assist households that experience flood damage to make necessary repairs in the aftermath of storms. These repair efforts will also include

the installation of fortification improvements, preventing the likelihood of repetitive storm damage in the face of future extreme weather conditions.

These improvements have the potential to reduce or eliminate flood risk, increase a homeowner's ability to shelter in place safely during a flood or other weather event, and reduce the cost of flood insurance premiums. HCR will also collaborate with the Departments of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and State (DOS), the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), and local government and non-profit organizations to identify appropriate geographic targets for this program. Specifically, the program will focus on homeowners at risk due to future flooding events, but where buyouts or home elevation may not be necessary or feasible.

The Resilient & Ready Program will enable HCR and other agencies to move swiftly following a storm to get assistance to homeowners in need. A panel of construction specialists will be pre-procured and on-call so resources can deploy rapidly and responsibly when a climate event occurs.

#### *Advance the Blue Buffers Voluntary Homeowner Buyout Program*

While New York has an obligation to do all that it can to safeguard shorefront communities, the State must also confront the reality that within the span of a 30-year mortgage issued today, large swaths of the coastline will face unprecedented danger from sea-level rise, storm-related flooding, and high-water events along coastlines and floodplains across the state. Homes and communities sitting at the very frontlines of climate change may not be able to withstand the onslaught of more frequent storms.

Targeted, voluntary buyout programs can help families that choose to participate to move out of harm's way, reduce homeowners' and governmental costs associated with repetitive flooding, and create space for resiliency projects that protect entire communities. The National Institute of Building Sciences estimates that buyouts save as much as \$9 for every \$1 spent.

If purchased contiguously, buyouts also help return sections of shorelines and floodplains to resilient habitats, including wetlands, which can absorb storm surge and high water to further protect and buffer surrounding communities. Tidal marshes are thought to reduce “wave action” by up to 50%, while undeveloped land has a remarkable capacity to soak up rainfall. Wetlands are estimated to have averted approximately \$138 million in damages during Hurricane Sandy.

Therefore, Governor Hochul is proposing to create a “Blue Buffers” program to encourage voluntary buyouts in communities most vulnerable to flooding. The program will prioritize projects in communities based on the level of flood risk to ensure we protect those areas most vulnerable to high water and storm surge.

Blue Buffers, along with other state agencies, municipalities, or non-profits, will enter into agreements with property owners to acquire real property, based upon the pre-flood fair market value of the subject property; remove structures and/or infrastructure on the property; and restore natural resources to facilitate beneficial open space, flood mitigation, and/or shoreline stabilization. Real property purchased will be restored and maintained in a manner that aims to increase ecosystem function, provide additional flood damage mitigation for surrounding properties, protect wildlife habitat, and wherever practicable and safe, allow for recreational community use.

The 2022 Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act authorized up to \$250 million to be deployed to the voluntary buyout of properties at severe risk of future flooding. In its first year of operation, Blue Buffers will establish clear program parameters, identify areas of risk, and begin community outreach.

#### *Update Codes and Standards for Better, Safer Buildings*

At the Governor’s direction, the Codes Council will undertake an overhaul of building codes designed to bring New York up to the latest standards on resilient building. The Codes Council expects to lead the nation in its adoption of the International Building Code’s 2024

update, which includes crucial items such as higher standards for resistance to wind, snow, and temperature extremes.

### **Protect Our Communities**

Extreme weather driven by climate change is already affecting New York communities and is projected to continue to do so into the foreseeable future. Current and projected climate impacts include warmer temperatures, sea level rise, more frequent and severe storm events causing flooding, and unpredictable snowstorms- all with the potential to negatively impact our families and businesses. Sustainable and strategic resiliency planning is essential.

#### *Develop a Comprehensive Adaptation and Resilience Plan*

The Climate Action Council’s Scoping Plan includes the development of “a comprehensive State climate change adaptation and resilience plan based on a common vision of resilience” as a priority adaptation action.

Governor Hochul will direct DEC, NYSERDA, and DOS, in coordination with all relevant state agencies, to develop a comprehensive climate change adaptation and resilience plan to ensure state entities and localities can equitably adapt to climate change, including assessing impacts on disadvantaged communities, ecosystems, infrastructure, and vulnerable economic sectors. This statewide planning effort will supplement ongoing work to collect information and develop the resources needed to support the design and implementation of cost-effective strategies to reduce current and future climate risks – leveraging federal dollars and Environmental Bond Act investments to undertake dam removals, repairs to aging flood control structures, and advance green infrastructure projects.

*Release Cutting Edge Climate Projections to Identify Risk*

Governor Hochul will release the climate projections from the New York State Climate Impacts Assessment – the latest scientific investigation into how climate change is affecting New York’s communities, ecosystems, infrastructure, and industries. Developed in partnership with leading academic institutions, scientific organizations, community leaders, and subject-matter experts across all levels of government and industry, the forthcoming peer-reviewed research presents the latest climate projections for the state, information on the impacts of climate change, and sector-based strategies for adaptation and resilience. The information in this assessment confirms the importance of our greenhouse gas reduction initiatives and drives home the necessity of preparing for climate change impacts.

This multi-year effort led by NYSERDA was developed by and for New Yorkers to make informed choices about their future and provides the foundational data for all statewide climate adaptation work.

*Bolster Disaster Response*

Whenever a disaster strikes, New York State’s Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES) responds. DHSES works to protect New Yorkers and their homes, businesses, and communities from both weather-related and human-caused emergencies.

Recognizing the need for speedy and substantial State response to emergency situations, Governor Hochul will invest significant new resources in DHSES to put more boots on the ground, improve training and preparedness, and address evolving threats as they come.

While the State continues to invest in long-term resiliency efforts, New York must simultaneously invest in short-term response equipment to help communities mitigate the impacts of flooding and other weather events.

Governor Hochul will direct DHSES to supply our local and county partners with additional generators, high-flow pumps, and flood barrier technology. Under this proposal, New York will:

- Fund and deploy flood barrier technology for counties to store, maintain, and distribute to protect their infrastructure and communities from the impacts of flooding. Counties will be prioritized based on coastline, riverfront and historical flooding data, including major rivers and areas around Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, and the ocean/bay coastal areas surrounding Long Island, New York City, and Westchester.
- Fund and deploy generators, pumps, and ancillary equipment for counties to stockpile and maintain for the purpose of supporting public infrastructure and citizens in the event of widespread flash flooding and power outages. The number of pumps and generators will be based on county populations.

#### *Update Coastal Erosion Hazard Area Maps*

New York's outdated Coastal Erosion Hazard Area (CEHA) maps were originally issued as blueprints in the 1980s. However, maintaining the CEHA program is essential to the protection of beaches, dunes, and bluffs that maintain and enhance flood resilience.

Governor Hochul will direct DEC to update CEHA maps in an accessible electronic format that allows the State, local communities, and permit applicants to quickly determine if a property is within a CEHA.

These updated maps will help protect the shorelines across New York State, including along the Great Lakes, the Long Island Sound, the shoreline of Westchester County, portions of Kings, Queens, and Richmond counties, and the entire Long Island shoreline.

#### *Prepare, Respond, and Prevent Flooding in the Mohawk and Oswego River Basins*

The New York State Canal Corporation – as a result of the Upstate Flood Mitigation Task Force – working with DEC, DOT, DHSES, and other state agencies, will create groundbreaking numerical watershed modeling for the Mohawk and Oswego River Basins. Today, no modeling exists for either basins that accurately estimate normal or flood flows. Watershed models are critical to inform operational changes and estimates of recommended modifications.

The numerical watershed modeling effort will:

- Develop and calibrate hydrologic/hydraulic models using industry standard software;
- Enable scenario development and response simulation;
- Complete land and water-based surveys and update with new surveys; and
- Consider partnering with federal forecasting and educational entities.

The modeling will inform planning and emergency forecasting that can be accessed and utilized by all state agencies. By investing in the creation of numerical models, Governor Hochul is demonstrating responsiveness to the recommendations set forth by her Upstate Flood Mitigation Task Force.

*Give the Public Tools to Understand and Act on Climate Risk*

State agencies have extensive information and analysis on the expected impacts of climate change. To help communities better plan and prepare for climate impacts, the State will forge new partnerships and utilize technology solutions to manage risk more effectively. These will include an interactive web-based drought prediction tool, urban heat island mapping and modeling resources, a projected floodplain mapping tool, and an update of the State’s stormwater design manual to account for increased storm intensity associated with climate change.

## **Protect New York’s Infrastructure**

### *Fund Green Resiliency Grants*

The worsening climate crisis stresses the imperative need for more functional and sustainable urban planning and design. Currently, too many communities rely solely on “gray infrastructure” like drainage ditches, gutters, storm drains, pipes, culverts, canals, and mechanical pumping stations, which are all designed to direct and remove stormwater runoff from paved surfaces as quickly as possible. On the other hand, green infrastructure, which integrates natural features and systems into the built environment, helps mitigate flooding while reducing the burden on our aging gray infrastructure.

Green infrastructure also benefits communities in significant ways:

- Urban forests and parks provide cooling benefits during hot summers and reduce the impacts from the urban heat island effect.
- Street canopies provide shade for pedestrians.
- Replacing paving with permeable pavement decreases surface runoff and helps manage rain where it falls, reducing polluted runoff and flooding.
- Green walls and roofs benefit buildings and save energy by improving building insulation and helping to deliver improved air quality.
- Investments in nature have been documented to reduce crime in urban areas, help students improve test scores, increase property values, and improve the mental health and well-being of city residents.
- Green spaces serve as refuges for families to play and relax, helping to increase the social resilience of cities.

New York State will support green resiliency projects to combat flooding by launching a supercharged Green Resiliency Grant program that funds green infrastructure projects across the state – including green roofs and permeable pavement. Areas most affected by



climate change and extreme weather events will be prioritized for funding and increased funding will be available for our most vulnerable communities.

### *Make State Agencies More Sustainable and Climate-Resilient*

Governor Hochul's Executive Order 22 (EO22), "Leading by Example" is advancing environmental justice, sustainability, and decarbonization through our administrative operations and procurement. To support the implementation of EO 22, investments will be made to directly help bolster state facilities' decarbonization efforts and provide the resources necessary to initiate procurement practices that prioritize sustainable and climate-resilient design practices – greening our infrastructure while reducing emissions associated with state operations.

### *Repair Aging Flood Control Projects*

Erosion of New York's waterways and burying our streams in urban areas is often associated with heightened flood risk. With a changing climate, underground culverts with limited drainage capacity cannot withstand an increasing number of extreme rainfall events and many urban planners and local governments are restoring small, natural waterways to help prevent flooding and protect water quality.

To bolster these efforts, Governor Hochul will prioritize investing in our natural waterways and streams by creating the Resilient Watersheds Implementation Grant Program. To launch the new grant program, the State will fund priority flood mitigation projects in the County of Westchester, which experienced severe flooding in 2021 and again in fall 2023.

In addition to studies already underway, Governor Hochul will direct DEC to advance 40 new state-of-the-art flood resilience studies in flood-prone watersheds. Employing state-of-the-art methodologies, these studies will identify the causes of flooding in a watershed and develop, evaluate, and recommend effective and sustainable flood and ice jam hazard-

mitigation projects using the latest climate change forecasts and other tools to assess potential threats to public safety. Projects identified by these studies and other robust planning and design activities will be eligible to apply for the Resilient Watersheds Implementation Grant Program.

Furthermore, New York State is home to more than 100 State-owned flood control projects, consisting of 95 miles of walls and levees, most of which are more than 50 years old. These projects protect an estimated 23,000 structures and 75,000 people. Several flood control projects need repairs and improvements to meet future projected rainfall. DEC will advance efforts to rehabilitate, remove, repair or right-size priority flood control projects that provide the greatest level of flood risk reduction benefits.

#### *Reduce Risk by Restoring or Removing Hazardous Dams*

Dams are critical infrastructure to prevent flooding, but the state has hundreds of high-risk dams that could cause significant damage if they were to fail. Further, engineering experts have rated nearly half of the municipally owned dams in New York State as “unsound.” Aging dams with degraded structural integrity are more likely to sustain damage during heavy rains, posing a threat to human life and property. In addition, many aging dams no longer serve a useful purpose and would benefit local communities and ecosystems if removed. More than ever, streamlined removal processes and adequate funding are required to safeguard public safety and environmental health. Governor Hochul will direct DEC to establish a grant program to reduce flood risks and restore environmental connections through the removal, rehabilitation, improvement, and modernization of municipal and State-owned dams.

#### *Expand Climate Smart Community Grants*

The Climate Smart Communities program supports locally-driven efforts to meet the economic, social, and environmental challenges posed by climate change. Across the state,

more than 400 local governments are registered as climate smart communities, representing more than 9.5 million New Yorkers. In addition, more than 130 municipalities have taken the extra step to be certified as climate smart, undertaking a suite of actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and bolster sustainable practices. However, the current statutory 50% match requirement is a major barrier to entry, particularly for disadvantaged communities. To increase program participation, Governor Hochul will modernize the current program by increasing financial support for struggling localities.

#### *Update Water Regulations to Promote Resiliency*

The State will update the regulatory scoring method for funding clean water infrastructure to prioritize asset management and resilience to climate change. Projects may include relocating infrastructure or equipment to a higher elevation or reducing greenhouse gas emissions from wastewater systems by installing capture and reuse systems or systems that produce fewer greenhouse gasses.

#### **Protect Our Most Vulnerable**

By 2050, every corner of New York State is expected to see more frequent and severe extreme heat events, with some areas expected to experience 60 or more days each year with temperatures exceeding 90°F, leading to increased death and illness, especially among vulnerable individuals and communities. Currently under development by an interagency work group, formed by Governor Hochul in her 2022 State of the State, the Extreme Heat Adaptation Plan is identifying actionable strategies and programs to help protect communities – particularly disadvantaged communities – from the negative impacts of extreme heat events. Governor Hochul will advance key recommendations from the action plan.

#### *Expand Access to Healthy, Efficient Cooling for Vulnerable Populations*

As climate change increases the number of high-heat days, schools are struggling to keep cool due to outdated infrastructure in dire need of repairs or upgrades. Fluctuations in temperatures are shown to lead to school absences and disciplinary referrals. To help address these issues, the Governor will expand funding for cooling capacity for schools through the Clean Green Schools program.

Currently, this program serves under-resourced public schools and helps them become sustainable, resilient, and healthy learning environments in their community by not only decarbonizing buildings but also improving indoor air quality and filtration to mitigate issues arising from air pollutants, including wildfire smoke. Increased investment will also protect against extreme heat by prioritizing funding for efficient cooling systems in schools serving vulnerable populations. The state will encourage communities that receive this funding to install cooling systems that can be opened to the community during extreme heat events to help prevent heat-related illness or death.

#### *Deploy Air Conditioners to the Medically Vulnerable*

Almost 14% of New Yorkers will experience asthma at some point in their adult life, and asthma is the reason behind over 100,000 Emergency Department visits in New York every year. Asthma is much more prevalent amongst low income and Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) communities. People with asthma are more exposed to the growing public health risks posed by climate change – including heat waves, wildfires, and more. To mitigate this threat, the Department of Health will add coverage within the Essential Plan for the purchase, delivery and installation of air conditioners for members for whom persistent asthma poses a significant medical risk.

## **SECTION 12: ACHIEVING A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**

Navigating New York State towards a brighter, greener future is our obligation to the next generation. As the climate crisis accelerates and the world witnesses environmental degradation across habitats, Governor Hochul believes that New York can and must act as a beacon to show that progress is possible.

Governor Hochul has advanced nation-leading efforts to slash emissions, generate renewable energy, protect our environment, and deliver relief on utility bills. Over the past year, Governor Hochul has:

- Achieved a historic milestone with the successful delivery of clean power to Long Island from the first operational wind turbine at South Fork Wind, the first utility-scale offshore wind farm to begin delivering power in the United States.
- Announced the first rounds of available Bond Act funds, including \$200 million for water infrastructure and \$100 million for zero-emission school buses.
- Outlined principles to guide state agencies in the creation of a cap-and-invest program to accelerate climate action and fund a sustainable and affordable future for all New Yorkers.
- Launched the \$200 million EmPower+ home retrofits program to reduce energy costs for low-income New York families.
- Secured \$200 million in relief for high electric bills for 800,000 households.
- Announced the creation of New York's State Weather Risk Communication Center at the University of Albany, a first-of-its-kind operational collaboration between university researchers and State emergency managers.
- Advanced the development of projects that will provide thermal energy to meet customer heating, hot water, and cooling needs. Thermal energy networks have the

potential to decarbonize entire neighborhoods while reducing strain on the electric grid – all while cutting carbon emissions and creating well-paying jobs.

Recognizing the urgency of this moment, Governor Hochul is continuing to take action to make investments and reforms that are critical to achieving our climate and environmental goals.

### **Accelerate Clean Energy Infrastructure Buildout**

Under Governor Hochul's leadership, New York State is working every day to achieve its nation-leading goals of building an affordable, resilient, and clean electricity grid and reach 70% renewable power by 2030 and 100% zero-emissions power by 2040. Now supported by the nation's fastest process for renewable energy permitting at the Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES), New York has dozens of projects in the pipeline and 15 new clean energy projects were permitted over the past two years.

However, as New York continues to strive to build the clean energy infrastructure of the future, our pace of progress is jeopardized by the lack of a mechanism to fast-track transmission projects and grid interconnection decisions. New York has an ambitious 2030 renewable energy target, but historically, a single transmission project can take up to 24 months to permit. To achieve the state's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act's (Climate Act) targets, New York must accelerate the build-out of electric transmission and improve the interconnection process.

To address this urgent need, Governor Hochul is proposing the Renewable Action Through Project Interconnection and Deployment (RAPID) Act. The RAPID Act will create a one-stop-shop for the environmental review and permitting of major renewable energy and transmission facilities within ORES at the Department of Public Service (DPS). This will build on the success of both ORES and the existing transmission permitting process at DPS. The state's transmission permitting process will now feed into a clear statutory framework that balances transparency and environmental protection with the need for fast decision-

making. The RAPID Act will require that ORES, supported by DPS, continue to be responsive to community feedback and environmental considerations.

Governor Hochul will further direct DPS to open a proceeding to improve the interconnection of distributed energy resources. The proceeding will consider incentives, penalties, and other mechanisms for New York State utilities to facilitate faster and more efficient interconnection. In doing so, this proceeding will ensure distribution utilities across New York are held accountable to their responsibilities to build out the clean energy grid of the future.

### **Deliver Savings on Utility Bills**

Governor Hochul has made affordability a cornerstone of her energy agenda and dedicated more than \$1.2 billion in the State budget to energy affordability programs over the last two years. These measures have resulted in an average savings of \$1,400 per eligible utility customer. As New York continues to lead the way on climate, it is critical that New York households share in the financial benefits created by investments in clean energy technology and that investments in our current and future electric grid infrastructure are strategic and responsible. In 2024, Governor Hochul is taking historic new steps that together will result in \$100 to \$500 per year in future annual savings for more than half a million New York households.

### *Launch Statewide Solar for All*

Core to fulfilling the goals of the Climate Act is ensuring that the benefits of clean energy programs go to historically underserved and disadvantaged communities. Governor Hochul is launching Statewide Solar for All, an innovative program that will combine two successful state programs – the utility-managed Energy Affordability Program and Community Solar – to efficiently deliver clean energy savings to low-income households.

The Energy Affordability Program is designed to limit energy costs for low-income households to an average of no more than six percent of a household's income. Community Solar is a way for customers who don't own their property or are not able to install solar to access the benefits of clean energy. Unlike traditional solar, where panels are installed on someone's roof or property, community solar is installed at an offsite location, and multiple subscribers (i.e., households, businesses, or any other electricity customer) pay for a share of the electricity generated by the project. Community Solar subscribers receive an electric bill credit for electricity generated by their share of the Community Solar system, helping to reduce their electricity costs.

With the launch of Statewide Solar for All, more than 800,000 households already enrolled in the Energy Affordability Program will be able to receive an electric bill credit of \$40 per year from Community Solar and energy storage projects.

### *Responsibly Reduce Energy Infrastructure Costs*

Governor Hochul has taken unprecedented steps to accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels and protect affordability, but outdated provisions of state law have limited the ability of the DPS and utility companies to undertake long-term transition planning for the gas system in a sensible way. Current legal requirements threaten to saddle customers with hundreds of millions of dollars in additional costs for decades to come and limit customers' ability to take full advantage of new technologies.

This year, Governor Hochul will advance the Affordable Gas Transition Act, legislation supporting responsible, equitable, and effective gas system transition planning, including the elimination of the so-called "100-foot" rule and other provisions of law that restrict the Public Service Commission from protecting consumers and ensuring an effective transition to clean energy. This legislation will protect utility customers from bearing the cost of unwarranted investment in fossil fuel infrastructure, establish new rules and guidelines applying to the extension of gas service in alignment with the Climate Leadership and



Community Protection Act, and will not impact the safe and reliable provision of service to existing customers.

A responsible transition is one that keeps energy affordable while providing appropriate transparency and predictability to families, businesses, and labor organizations about the work and workers required to build and maintain energy infrastructure. In parallel, Governor Hochul is directing state agencies to take critical steps that promote affordability for customers who switch from natural gas for heating. DPS, in consultation with the state housing and energy agencies, will advance mechanisms that prioritize energy affordability and ensure customer protection for New York homes and businesses that electrify for heating.

#### *Launch the Smart Energy Savings Initiative*

To continue New York State's legacy of cleantech innovation, Governor Hochul will launch the Smart Energy Savings Initiative, allowing New Yorkers to save on their utility bills by better managing daily energy usage. For participating households, smart technology will help schedule periods of significant energy use – such as charging an electric vehicle (EV) or adjusting a smart thermostat – to take place when electricity demand and cost are lowest. Depending on the utility and the household, participating New Yorkers with EVs could save upwards of \$200 per year, and New Yorkers with heat pumps could save between \$100 and \$500 per year. The initiative will focus on integrating the patchwork of utility programs and State-led policies, plans and programs to manage energy demand in a way that maximizes cost and energy savings and quickly scaling up the capacity of those programs to deliver savings. When enough New Yorkers manage their energy use in a coordinated way, it can reduce overall energy demand and avoid costly infrastructure investments, including in polluting power plants, and unlock savings that can be shared by customers, utilities, and innovative cleantech providers.

#### *Initiate New York Grid of the Future Proceeding*

As economic development projects blossom around the state and more New Yorkers electrify with EVs and heat pumps, New York has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to plan investments that build a truly affordable, resilient and clean grid. Governor Hochul is directing the Department of Public Service to harness innovation by initiating the New York Grid of the Future proceeding. The proceeding will identify smart grid technologies that will enable flexible services, like virtual power plants, that can be deployed to achieve our clean energy goals at a manageable cost. This proceeding will deliver a New York Grid of the Future Plan by the end of 2024, laying out clear targets for needed capabilities, required investments, and expected benefits and savings.

### **Safeguard New York's Clean Water**

In 2024, New York will embark on a new era of clean water investments guided by Governor Hochul's vision, leadership, and priorities. Building on the extraordinary success of the \$4.2 billion Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act, and water funding focused on equity and environmental justice, Governor Hochul's plan will launch new initiatives to protect water quality, root out emerging contaminants, protect against climate change, ensure affordability, and prioritize disadvantaged communities.

Governor Hochul is proposing continued commitment for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act, incorporating critical advancements in programs and policies to achieve the Governor's priorities of equity and excellence. Through these initiatives, Governor Hochul will assist municipalities in meeting their drinking water and clean water funding needs. State grant funds will help communities meet challenges associated with emerging contaminants, harmful algal blooms (HABs), outdated sewer infrastructure, and lead service line removal while capitalizing on the economic returns from these investments. This funding will also advance effective planning and implementation, especially by disadvantaged communities.

With this funding, in addition to support from the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), federal funds, and the Environmental Bond Act, the State will continue supporting essential

water projects while making changes to improve funding delivery and provide the greatest benefit to communities.

*Deliver Support for Rural Communities*

New York provides significant funding for water infrastructure projects. However, even with this financial support from the State, some municipalities are still left with a large financial burden that must be passed on to ratepayers in the form of user fees. To alleviate this burden on small, rural, and disadvantaged communities, Governor Hochul is directing the Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC) to increase water infrastructure grants for small rural communities from 25% to 50% of net eligible project costs. This change will support smaller communities, like those in the Adirondacks, which often struggle with accessing clean water grants and delivering affordable projects.

*Expand Community Resources to Ensure Equitable Access to Funding Opportunities*

Small, rural, and disadvantaged communities are particularly impacted by deteriorating water infrastructure and emerging contaminants, and often do not possess the resources and capacity necessary to advance a project for infrastructure improvement. To provide essential support for updating New York's critical water infrastructure, the State will continue to expand the efforts of the Community Assistance Teams program to assist more communities in developing projects.

*Protect Drinking Water*

Governor Hochul will also strengthen New York's Source Water Protection efforts by directing relevant state agencies to advance and accelerate community-led programs to identify, abate, and eliminate pollution risks to municipal drinking water supplies. The State will grant further resources to a locally-led, state-supported program that empowers

municipalities to take action to improve and protect their public drinking water sources and surrounding environment, including free technical assistance to develop and implement community-specific drinking water source protection plans. Lastly, our state agencies will initiate engineering planning grants for drinking water projects addressing emerging contaminants and lead service line replacement, in addition to wastewater, to help expand community capability in developing drinking water infrastructure.

#### *Prioritize PFAS Track Down and Source Control Efforts*

Building on New York's national leadership on addressing the threat of emerging contaminants, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) will continue to track down sources of PFAS from legacy industrial sites across the state to reduce PFAS exposure and releases into the environment. In addition to sustaining DEC's ongoing efforts to investigate potential sources of contamination, Governor Hochul will also expand funding opportunities for localities to help address PFAS and other emerging contaminants.

#### *Introduce New Guidance to Reduce Harmful Algae Blooms*

DEC will issue guidance values for phosphorus to support and further drive comprehensive efforts to reduce the frequency of harmful algae blooms with the potential to negatively impact drinking water quality and access to swimming and recreation in New York's waters.

#### *Protect Our Lakes*

New York's lakes are highly valued for recreation and tourism and often serve as dependable sources of clean drinking water. However, HABs can negatively affect New York's water bodies by compromising water quality and opportunities for recreation. To address this issue and help protect our valuable ecosystems, Governor Hochul will dedicate

resources to some of the most highly valued watersheds, including the eastern Finger Lakes watershed and Chautauqua Lake.

These lakes and their watersheds are critical resources to New York State, yet more recently, the eastern Finger Lakes have reported a greater frequency of HABs. In response, Governor Hochul is directing key investments into the Eastern Finger Lakes Coalition of Soil and Water Conservation Districts to build professional capacity and accelerate agricultural and resiliency-related projects – specifically providing necessary capital investments that will galvanize implementation of the plans and programs developed to address on-the-ground actions necessary to address the root causes of HABs and significantly reduce their prevalence. The capital infusion will also include support for farmers to invest in more cover crops, improve culverts to reduce runoff, and other investments to improve soil health and reduce water quality impairments in the region.

Governor Hochul is also focused on restoring recreational opportunities in Chautauqua Lake, which has also reported an increase in the frequency of HABs. She will direct DEC to work with State, federal, and nonprofit partners to implement comprehensive pollution reduction strategies, including advanced water quality monitoring, completion of a feasibility study to determine the extent and severity of internal phosphorus loading, and simultaneously begin work on projects that can reduce nutrients entering the lake such as streambed stabilization, vegetative buffers, and rain gardens.

## **Make New York Greener**

### *Plant 25 Million Trees in the Next Decade*

Achieving New York State's goals under the Climate Act will require unprecedented support for the environment, including the need to plant and maintain 1.7 million acres of new forest by 2040. To make this vision a reality and jumpstart creation of our forests of the future, Governor Hochul is announcing a goal of planting 25 million trees by 2033. This broad goal will invigorate our state's tree planting efforts, send an unmistakable market

signal to private nurseries, and advance efforts to meet the Climate Act's net-zero goal, while growing the state's vital forest products industry.

Governor Hochul will also prioritize tree planting in urban areas to mitigate potential extreme heat, as cities warm faster than rural areas. Investing in urban forests can help reduce peak summer temperatures in targeted city areas by up to an estimated 9° fahrenheit. These efforts will also engage youth across the state through education and planting programs to foster a conservation ethic, inspire the next generation of environmental stewards, and create deeper connections about the importance of trees for the environment, climate, and public health.

To put New York on a path to achieve these goals, the State will provide annual grants to municipalities over three years to plant trees to support resilient reforestation and urban forests. Generating the supply of trees necessary to meet the climate goals requires a major reinvestment to modernize the Saratoga tree nursery, the oldest such nursery in the country.

#### *Establish the Erie Canal Bicentennial Commission*

To commemorate the upcoming 200th anniversary of the completion of the original Erie Canal in 2025, Governor Hochul will establish the Bicentennial Commission to recognize this historic waterway. The Commission will be responsible for the planning, scheduling, and execution of a series of public meetings and events throughout 2024, and the development of a robust calendar of commemorative events to be held beginning in January of 2025. The Commission's work will culminate in the World Canals Conference in Buffalo in September 2025. These events will highlight the vital role of the canal system as an example of New York's spirit of ingenuity and its contemporary role as a driver of upstate economies and public recreational assets.

#### *Launch the Clean Transportation Standard Study*

Transportation sector emissions continue to account for nearly one-third of New York State's greenhouse gas emissions, while also contributing to local air quality pollution and negative health impacts, especially in disadvantaged communities historically overburdened by pollution. Therefore, targeting transportation emissions through sector-specific actions can deliver multiple benefits to the state and its residents.

To enable the success of initiatives to reduce emissions in the transportation sector and ensure that all New Yorkers benefit from the resulting air quality improvements, NYSERDA and DEC will launch a study to analyze the benefits of a Clean Transportation Standard in New York State. The study will focus on how such a standard can help drive the state toward a zero-emission transportation sector by 2050, while supporting the deployment of electric and zero-emission transportation in overburdened and disadvantaged communities.

## **SECTION 13: MAKING NEW YORK A GREAT PLACE TO WORK AND DO BUSINESS**

Over the past year, as part of a holistic strategy to develop our workforce, support high-growth industries, strengthen small business, and build the infrastructure of tomorrow, Governor Hochul has:

- Enacted a historic increase to New York’s minimum wage that results in annual wage increases through 2027, when it will then index to the rate of inflation, ensuring that wages keep pace with the cost of living, and making New York one of the first states to do so.
- Announced a transformative, \$10 billion partnership to create a next-generation research and development center at Albany NanoTech, making New York home to the nation’s most advanced, publicly-owned semiconductor R&D infrastructure.
- Launched the Governor’s Office of Semiconductor Expansion, Management, and Integration, a \$45 million initiative to support Micron’s historic \$100 billion investment in New York State to create 50,000 new jobs and bolster the State’s efforts to grow the chipmaking ecosystem.
- Secured a historic expansion of New York’s film and television production tax credit to support the State’s growing film industry by raising the annual cap to \$700 million.

In 2024, Governor Hochul will redouble her efforts to make New York the best place in the country to live, work, and do business.

**Create the Conditions to Attract and Grow Businesses**



*Invest in Shovel-Ready Sites to Attract Businesses*

Manufacturers and supply-chain partners are reshoring operations to the United States in record numbers, fueled by federal incentives, security concerns about reliance on overseas suppliers, and the creation of new markets. In 2022, the number of reshoring projects with a total investment of over \$1 billion was double the average number of such projects in each year from 2011 to 2021.<sup>37</sup> This has created fierce competition among states for high-impact, job-creating projects. When choosing where to locate, businesses are seeking both shovel-ready sites and predictability.

In 2022, Governor Hochul announced the launch of the Focused Attraction of Shovel-Ready Tracts New York (FAST NY) program, allocating \$200 million to develop sites to attract high-tech manufacturing to the state, particularly semiconductor manufacturing, distribution, and logistics businesses.

To enhance New York's competitive posture, Governor Hochul will launch a new round of the FAST NY program. This will ensure New York can continue to attract large-scale economic development projects that bring 21<sup>st</sup>-century jobs and sustained investment in communities across the state. It will also prepare sites for the arrival of semiconductor supply chain partners that establish and grow their presence in the state, building off of Micron's historic \$100 billion investment in Central New York.

*Create One Network for Regional Advanced Manufacturing Partnerships (ON-RAMP)*

Capitalizing on the rapid growth of the semiconductor industry in New York State and the reshoring of traditional and advanced manufacturing businesses will require not only shovel-ready sites, but also a steady pipeline of skilled workers ready to fill jobs that come with Micron and other semiconductor and supply chain companies. Since taking office, Governor Hochul has added more than 13,000 manufacturing jobs to the state's economy, with many more to follow. And Governor Hochul has already made significant inroads towards addressing the renewed need for skilled workers through the creation of ESD's Office of Strategic Workforce Development – which has awarded a majority of its funding to

date to advanced manufacturing projects – and the Governor’s Office of Semiconductor Expansion, Management, and Integration (GO-SEMI).

In Buffalo, the Northland Workforce Training Center (Northland) is an industry-driven workforce development center, and community anchor in an otherwise impoverished neighborhood. Replicating the success of the Northland model, Governor Hochul will launch a new program to establish additional workforce development centers in strategic, high-impact locations to meet the growing demand for high-skilled workers. The ESD-led program – One Network for Regional Advanced Manufacturing Partnerships (ON-RAMP) – will offer credentials and training related to advanced manufacturing with a focus on providing opportunities for disadvantaged populations.

The ON-RAMP network will consist of four new workforce development centers that span upstate New York, with a focus on the I-90 corridor, and a flagship facility in Syracuse overseen by CenterState CEO, Central New York’s premier business leadership and economic development organization. Three additional centers will be designated on a competitive basis that will leverage opportunities in upstate New York, including the Capital Region and along the I-90 corridor encompassing Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse, which was recently designated a federal “Tech Hub.”

ON-RAMP will catalyze partnerships between employers, educational institutions, community organizations, and State and local governments. Each center will build the skills of the local labor pool, connect employers with the skilled workers they need, and develop long-lasting economic on-ramps to training, apprenticeships, and employment for disadvantaged populations. Each center will advance Governor Hochul’s commitment to eliminating barriers to training and employment by working with local nonprofits and community partners to provide wrap-around services like transportation, child care, and job placement services.

### *Transform Blighted Communities*

Blight has a chilling effect on neighborhood vitality, discourages the arrival of new businesses, and depresses economic activity. Removing blight is transformational for communities, but municipalities often lack the resources to undertake such projects on their own. The Restore NY program, in which Governor Hochul invested \$50 million in last year's budget, has served as a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization and business attraction in communities across the state. In Schenectady, a \$5 million Restore NY award to demolish a factory that had sat idle for half a century unlocked a new Mohawk Harbor development that has since attracted nearly \$600 million in private investment.

In 2024, Governor Hochul will help build livable communities through Restore NY. This new competitive funding round will support projects that turn vacant, abandoned, and condemned properties into viable sites that advance key goals including downtown redevelopment, waterfront planning and resiliency, and housing production.

#### *Expand Localities' Access to DASNY Construction Services*

To fully recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and address the escalating climate crisis, State and federal dollars must be used quickly and efficiently. However, many communities lack the resources and expertise to plan and complete projects. The Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY) has the expertise and staff resources to complete projects in a timely manner but is limited in the types of entities it is authorized to assist.

Governor Hochul will advance legislation to allow municipalities and state agencies to utilize DASNY's planning, design, procurement, and construction management services for a wider range of projects. This will provide State and local partners with a valuable resource to accelerate project implementation. DASNY's enhanced scope will include projects funded in whole or in part by State programs such as the Downtown Revitalization Initiative, NY Forward, and the Environmental Bond Act of 2022, as well as by the federal government through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 and the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022.

## **Empower Small Business**

### *Help Small Businesses Navigate Environmental Regulations*

Governor Hochul has implemented a bold climate plan that reaffirms New York's status as a national leader in protecting the environment. While existing State and federal environmental regulations are in place to ensure a clean and safe environment for all, regulations can also prove challenging for small business owners to interpret and implement. ESD currently employs an Environmental Ombudsman that provides businesses with free, confidential advice on how to navigate regulations, avoid non-compliance, and remedy violations. However, due to federal funding requirements, the position is currently limited to assisting businesses with issues related to air quality.

To assist small businesses in better navigating existing regulations and taking advantage of available resources, ESD will expand its Ombudsman program by establishing the Small Business Environmental Support Office (SBESO). The SBESO will assist small businesses with a wide range of environmental regulations, including those involving water, air, waste, bulk storage, and more. Providing this level of hands-on support will help the State achieve its goals both on climate change and business climate.

### *Create New Avenues for Immigrant Entrepreneurs*

Immigrant entrepreneurs play a critical role in driving New York's economy. Immigrants are more than twice as likely as native-born residents to start their own business, and over 37% of business owners in New York are foreign-born.<sup>38</sup> International students are especially vital in STEM fields and to the state's innovation economy – earning more than 44% of graduate degrees in STEM awarded by SUNY in 2020-2021<sup>39</sup> – but many graduates are unable to secure visas and are forced to leave New York and start companies abroad. Further, starting and growing a small business can be challenging, and immigrants often face additional barriers when looking to start, sustain, or expand their own business.

Governor Hochul is launching a new, multi-pronged effort to ensure New York’s immigrant communities have access to the tools and resources to realize their full entrepreneurial and economic potential. At the Governor’s direction, ESD will offer competitive grants to research universities and colleges to retain international entrepreneurs who would otherwise be unable to launch start-ups in New York. Participating graduate and doctoral students will have an opportunity to obtain university-sponsored visas that allow them to continue performing and commercializing research without leaving the state – something that is essential to the expansion of New York’s innovation economy.

Additionally, ESD will create a virtual center that consolidates the many existing resources offered by ESD and other state agencies, in order to help immigrant small business owners access them through a user-friendly and accessible public website. The result will be a one-stop shop that helps immigrant entrepreneurs easily reach services, including ESD’s capital access and regulatory relief programs; the Office for New Americans’ naturalization and English language and digital literacy services; and SUNY’s academic, entrepreneurial, and civic engagement programs.

### **Require Paid Breaks for Breast Milk Expression in the Workplace**

New York has long been a leader in protecting nursing mothers’ ability to fully participate in the workplace. In June, New York State began requiring that workplaces offer safe, hygienic, and convenient places for nursing employees to pump privately and with dignity, a major advancement in fostering a more inclusive and productive New York State workforce.

More can be done to ensure nursing mothers are accommodated in the workplace. Currently, employees that need to express milk in the workplace receive only unpaid breaks to do so. Taking unpaid time to express milk at work means a reduction in pay or adding time to the end of the workday. Neither option is ideal for an employee with childcare responsibilities. Women frequently encounter a “motherhood penalty” – they are more likely to temporarily exit the workforce or work part-time to raise children. This

reduction in earnings can have significant long-term financial implications. Providing flexibility in the workplace for employees to express milk without fear of losing income will combat some of the factors leading to the motherhood penalty.

To support breastfeeding parents in the workplace, Governor Hochul is proposing new legislation requiring all breaks for breast milk expression under 20 minutes to be paid. This change would allow hard-working mothers to preserve their paycheck, while driving greater worker retention.

### **Promote Economic Growth By Investing in the Arts**

New York's creative sector is a key driver of economic growth that employs hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. In 2021, arts and cultural economic activity accounted for 7.6 percent of New York's GDP, or nearly \$144 billion in economic activity. Over 450,000 jobs in New York, paying nearly \$59 billion in wages, can be traced back to arts and culture.<sup>40</sup> New York's status as a cultural capital gives it a competitive advantage that supports core industries including tourism, retail, and hospitality.

Theaters and cultural institutions bring millions of tourists to New York City each year who shop at local businesses and stay in nearby hotels.<sup>41</sup> In remote areas, arts organizations serve as important regional hubs for community activity, anchoring downtown revitalization efforts, reanimating abandoned buildings and blighted lots, and contributing to the renaissance of towns and cities facing population loss and the decline of traditional industries. In every corner of the state, they provide programming that supports healthier, happier, more connected, engaged, and equitable communities.

Under Governor Hochul, New York has made historic investments in the creative sector through the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA). In 2022, Governor Hochul provided NYSCA with an additional \$100 million in new, multi-year funding to help non-profit arts organizations undertake large-scale capital projects that prioritize community

development and placemaking. This represented the State’s largest-ever commitment to NYSCA for capital projects.

This year, Governor Hochul will continue to invest in the State’s dynamic arts and cultural sector. \$50 million in new capital funding will allow NYSCA to offer an additional round of grants for projects of all sizes, ranging from \$50,000 to \$10 million.

Governor Hochul is also launching Arts Pluribus Unum, an investment in public art that empowers artists to take center stage in the State’s continued economic growth. Elements of Arts Pluribus Unum will include a “State of the Arts” Fellowship Program to embed working artists within state agencies, web resources to drive visitors to cultural tourist attractions, and a grant competition to fund the design and installation of public murals in communities across New York.

### **Bolster Workforce Development**

With the post-pandemic worker shortages continuing to impact all sectors of New York’s economy, we must continue to develop new ways to give New Yorkers the skills they need to thrive in high-quality and in-demand jobs.

#### *Expand State Apprenticeships to Youth and Public Service Workers*

Apprenticeship programs are highly effective training models, allowing apprentices to have a job from day one, earn while they learn, and obtain a valuable, transferrable credential. To create more pathways into the workforce for young people and build a stronger state workforce, Governor Hochul will seek to establish a Youth Apprenticeship model, to be developed by the Department of Labor (DOL) and the State Education Department, to create a rewarding alternative career path for students who may be unable to pursue the traditional post secondary path. Not only will apprenticeships open options for students, they will also bring industry along to become co-producers of talent and not reliant only on what the postsecondary system can bring to the table.

Governor Hochul will also launch a pilot at DOL for a Registered Apprenticeship program in State government, with a path to a permanent State position upon completion of the program. All state agencies are struggling with filling vacancies and achieving staffing levels necessary to meet the needs of New Yorkers. By paving the way for apprenticeships in State government, agencies can tap into new talent pools while providing more opportunities for New Yorkers who otherwise would be unable to access these high quality jobs.

*Establish an Office of Workforce Data and Research*

With better longitudinal data tracking on the long and short-term outcomes of workforce development interventions, New York can make more informed decisions on where to direct funding to have the most impact.

By launching the Office of Workforce Data and Research, Governor Hochul will initiate a cross-agency comprehensive effort to monitor and measure data from educational institutions, employers, and workforce development programs. The Office will seek to fill data gaps, identifying where data is available but not connected and where data modeling could make probability estimates of where the future of work and labor is going.

*Expand the Teacher Ambassador Program*

Teachers and school counselors play a vital role in preparing students for the workforce. Helping educators better respond to local labor market needs can launch students towards rewarding career pathways. In 2023, DOL launched a Teacher Ambassador pilot program, which was deemed a success by participating schools and students. To expand the impact of the Teacher Ambassador program, Governor Hochul will propose a permanent Teacher Ambassador program and double program capacity to 60 teachers statewide.



## **Protect New York's Workers**

### *Create and Distribute a Youth Workers Bill of Rights*

There has been an increase in the number of child labor cases across the state over the past few years, growing significantly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Complaints received by DOL have increased from approximately 150 in 2015 to nearly 500 in 2022. Young workers are injured more frequently in the workplace than adults, and are more likely to work in environments where they are subject to injury.

Currently, minors who have employment certificates, or “working papers,” are not necessarily provided with any information about their rights in the workplace. To help address the needs of minors in the workplace, Governor Hochul will direct DOL to publish and distribute a Youth Workers Bill of Rights, which will be included on employment certificates.

### *Expand Recovery of Stolen Wages*

Theft of a worker’s hard-earned wages not only puts the worker at risk of not being able to provide for their family but gives bad actor employers an unfair advantage over employers trying to do the right thing. Governor Hochul’s DOL has and will continue to prioritize cracking down on wage theft and getting money back into the hands of workers.

The industries that suffer the highest frequency of wage theft are industries with high turnover and low stability, which presents a challenge if an employer has declared bankruptcy or shuttered by the time DOL identifies a violation. In other instances, employers may have acted dishonestly to avoid wage theft investigations and penalties, moving funds to prevent discovery. Governor Hochul will propose giving DOL more tools to address these enforcement challenges and help workers recover stolen wages.

### *Protect Outdoor Workers from Extreme Weather Hazards*

Climate change is increasing the prevalence and scale of extreme weather events. Without action to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, different regions of New York State are projected to experience between 2 and 57 additional days above 90°F per year, compared to the 2000-2004 baseline. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has no official standards around extreme weather in the workplace. Because there are no federal standards, an average of 350 people in New York City alone die prematurely because of heat-related illnesses each summer. When the temperature hits 85 degrees, workers in the City are 7% more likely to be injured on the job. At 95 degrees, this percentage goes up to 8%.

To help protect outdoor workers against extreme weather, Governor Hochul is directing DOL to develop and issue guidance and best practices for employers to ensure the safety of their workers in extreme heat, poor air quality, and extreme precipitation. Guidance may encompass recommendations ranging from providing frequent breaks, simple shade measures, free water, or visibly displayed thermometers.

## **SECTION 14: IMPROVING THE HEALTH OF NEW YORKERS**

### **Increase the Resiliency of the Healthcare System**

With more than \$300 billion in spending across all payers, New York’s healthcare system is one of the largest and most complex in the nation, comprising the full spectrum of medical services that New Yorkers need – primary care, specialty care, emergency care and hospital visits, long-term care, pharmacy benefits, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and more.<sup>42</sup> Over the last two years, Governor Hochul has made multi-billion-dollar investments in safety-net hospitals, passed the largest Medicaid rate increases in more than a decade, and announced \$2.6 billion in capital transformation funding to help transform and modernize New York’s healthcare facilities. Last year, Governor Hochul announced New York’s Future of Healthcare Commission, a group of leading healthcare experts who will play a critical role in developing a long-term vision for New York’s healthcare ecosystem.

Despite these efforts, New York’s healthcare delivery system still faces significant challenges. The state trails the nation on key access, quality, and safety measures, which disproportionately impact vulnerable populations. New York ranks 46<sup>th</sup> in the nation in emergency department wait times. Hospital quality and safety ratings rank similarly low – 45<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> in the nation respectively.<sup>43</sup> Health outcomes are worse for New York’s communities of color. Black New Yorkers’ rates of maternal mortality are five times higher, and rates of diabetes-related deaths are two times higher, when compared to those of white New Yorkers.<sup>44</sup> Low-income New Yorkers rely heavily on access to the state’s critical safety-net hospitals, which continue to experience worsening financial instability despite subsidy funding that has tripled since 2021.<sup>45</sup> New York’s long term care system, which already spends nearly twice as much per capita as the national average<sup>46</sup>, faces mounting pressure from an aging population where nearly a quarter of the state will be over 60 by 2025.<sup>47</sup> And while New York proudly remains at the forefront of health technology and

innovation, cyberattacks targeting healthcare facilities in recent years have exposed new vulnerabilities that threaten patient safety, security, and privacy.<sup>48</sup>

### *Launch a Healthcare Safety Net Transformation Program*

New York is home to some of the leading healthcare institutions in the world, and yet many New Yorkers lack access to high quality care. The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated the challenges facing New York's hospitals. In aggregate, New York ranks 45<sup>th</sup> in hospital quality nationally and 40<sup>th</sup> on safety.<sup>49</sup> New York hospitals have an average patient experience rating of 2.5 out of 5, as compared to an average rating of 3.3 for hospitals nationwide.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, hospitals in New York are struggling financially more than in the rest of the U.S. – 42% of hospital facilities in New York had an operating deficit in 2021.<sup>51</sup>

Governor Hochul will take several steps to transform the healthcare delivery system to improve access, equity, quality, and outcomes while also increasing financial sustainability. First, Governor Hochul is announcing the launch of the Healthcare Safety Net Transformation Program, which will leverage New York's world-leading clinical and operational expertise to support struggling facilities. Through this program, New York will offer financial resources and regulatory flexibilities to encourage partnerships that improve the resilience of safety-net institutions. Second, New York is pursuing a waiver from the federal government to secure billions of dollars of multi-year funding to support New York's safety-net hospitals and encourage them to transform in ways that will improve care and financial sustainability.

### *Streamline and Modernize New York's Healthcare Approval Program*

In the 1960s, New York was the first state in the nation to pass certificate of need laws, which govern the establishment, construction, and renovation of health care facilities. When first conceived, the CON process was intended to help improve healthcare planning

and avoid unnecessary duplication of services. However, in the more than half a century since its inception, the law governing the CON program has not kept pace with changes in healthcare delivery and growing costs. Since the program was last substantively updated in 2017, rising construction costs<sup>52</sup> and evolving standards of care mean many projects now considered routine still qualify for extensive levels of review, leading to longer processing times.

To alleviate strain on both providers and the State, Governor Hochul will instruct the Department of Health to make necessary updates to the State's CON program, such as raising the financial thresholds that qualify a project for more detailed review and streamlining the application and approval processes, including for now-routine services.

### *Strengthen Hospital Cyber Resilience*

Cyberattacks are on the rise across the United States, and New York is no exception. The number of cyberattacks in New York State increased by 53% between 2016 and 2022.<sup>53</sup> In 2022, New York's most targeted critical infrastructure sector was healthcare and public health.<sup>54</sup> And these attacks have major implications for New Yorkers – health-related cyberattacks not only jeopardize New Yorkers' personal information, but result in diversion of ambulances and emergency services, delays in surgeries and other procedures, and loss of access to critical medical history information needed for patient care.<sup>55</sup>

Soberingly, cyberattacks have been directly linked to increased mortality rates in targeted hospitals.<sup>56</sup> While many of New York's health systems have already taken action to protect themselves against cyberattacks, many of New York's hospitals – particularly those serving vulnerable communities and with limited resources – require additional protections.

To address these issues, in 2023, Governor Hochul announced nation-leading cybersecurity regulations for New York's hospitals. In the FY2024 budget, Governor Hochul also backed these regulations with \$500 million of technology capital funding to help hospitals across the state implement a variety of technological improvements, including common sense procedures to mitigate the risk of cyberattacks. Building further on these efforts, this year

New York will establish a New York Hospital Cybersecurity Roundtable to share best practices across the state's hospitals – ensuring that healthcare facilities have not only the mandate and necessary funding, but also the implementation and operational support they need to strengthen their cybersecurity posture.

### *Modernize Emergency Medical Services*

When a New Yorker calls an ambulance in a time of crisis, they deserve assurance that one will respond. However, because emergency medical services (EMS) are not an “essential service” under State law, this is not a guarantee. While the average response time for EMS is less than nine minutes, wait times can range wildly across the state, with some more than an hour.<sup>57</sup> This is driven in part by the 9% decline in EMS agencies over the past decade and a diminished EMS workforce: the number of active EMS practitioners has declined by 18% since 2019.<sup>58</sup>

This year, Governor Hochul will advance legislation to make EMS an essential service to ensure that emergency medical service providers are required to respond to emergencies. In addition, Governor Hochul will build upon the progress made in last year's budget by directing the newly established EMS statewide taskforce to create five “EMS zones.” Each zone will maintain its own EMS workforce to augment local EMS agencies where the workforce is insufficient and can be deployed to respond to emergencies statewide. Finally, Governor Hochul will establish a first-in-the-nation Paramedic Telemedicine Urgent Care program, which will use paramedics in rural areas and a healthcare provider via telemedicine to deliver low-acuity emergency services in a fixed location to decrease demands on the EMS system *and* reduce unnecessary ER visits.

### *Encourage New Care Models Closer to Home*

While some healthcare procedures and treatments require a hospital or emergency room setting, certain clinical services can be provided more appropriately and with better

patient satisfaction in a patient's home or community. Nationwide, new care models are emerging that bring healthcare out of the hospital and into the community or a patient's home. During the pandemic, New York State authorized community paramedicine programs with 55 EMS agencies serving 40 counties providing these services. At the same time, the federal government approved the designation of 15 New York hospitals to deliver inpatient care in the homes of Medicare patients.

Governor Hochul will introduce legislation to allow hospitals that meet certain requirements in New York to deliver care in patient homes as appropriate, and to permit emergency medical services providers to provide care in the community during non-emergent situations. This will reduce ER overcrowding and wait times, relieve our overburdened hospital system, and lead to better patient experiences.

#### *Improve Access and Transparency for Assisted Living Residences*

As the population of aging New Yorkers grows, the State needs a long-term care system that helps New Yorkers remain in the appropriate care setting for as long as possible. Assisted Living Residences are a critical component of this system. Yet today, several barriers prevent New Yorkers from accessing high quality Assisted Living Residences. First, the State lacks clear and consistent data on the quality of Assisted Living Residences, making it difficult for consumers and their families to make an informed decision on the right place to receive care. Second, many New Yorkers who wish to remain in Assisted Living Residences lack the financial resources to do so and must instead move into nursing homes. The State Special Needs Assisted Living Residence (SNALR) Voucher program is intended to provide subsidies to help individuals with Alzheimer's disease or dementia remain in Assisted Living Residences, yet the program is currently only authorized as a temporary demonstration and has a growing waitlist.

In order to address these issues and promote transparency, Governor Hochul will direct the Department of Health to establish quality reporting and accreditation requirements for all Assisted Living Residences in New York State. The Department of Health will publish

these quality measures to ensure that consumers have the information they need to make the right choice of home. In addition, Governor Hochul will introduce legislation to make the SNALR Voucher program permanent, enabling the Department of Health to expand the program to more recipients.

### **Strengthen the Healthcare Workforce**

More than one million New Yorkers are employed in the state's healthcare sector; these New Yorkers are essential to the healthcare delivery system and sustaining the state's economy.<sup>59</sup> Prior to the pandemic, the healthcare workforce was increasing in New York by 3 to 4 percent annually, just barely sufficient to keep pace with rising demand.<sup>60</sup> A pre-pandemic survey in 2018 projected that New York needed to grow the number of healthcare workers 32 percent by 2028.<sup>61</sup> However, by the end of 2020 the healthcare workforce had declined by 3.6 percent.<sup>62</sup> In recognition of this problem, in 2022 Governor Hochul announced a goal of increasing the healthcare workforce by 20% over 5 years and made historic investments to accomplish this goal.

Access, equity, and affordability challenges within the healthcare system are exacerbated by the ongoing healthcare staffing crisis. Since 2020, the workforce has increased, but at rates lower than those prior to the pandemic – just 3.3 percent between 2020 and 2022.<sup>63</sup> Insufficient staffing impacts the number of hospital beds available for patients when they need care. Staffed hospital beds have declined across the state since 2021, but at a significantly greater rate upstate than downstate.<sup>64</sup> This trend upstate has impacted some regions more than others – areas in Western New York and the North Country saw declines of up to 40%.<sup>65</sup> Both recruitment and retention remain critical problems for the healthcare workforce. In a study of annual healthcare job openings, 64% of positions were in the field of home health and personal care, followed by 22% of positions in nursing.<sup>66</sup> And even as the COVID-19 pandemic begins to recede, healthcare workers continue to report high levels of burnout, intensifying challenges in recruitment and retention, and threatening the growth of the state's workforce.



### *Sustain and Retain Healthcare Workers*

This healthcare workforce shortage affects the entire continuum of care. For example, the behavioral health crisis is driven in part by the shortage of mental health professionals. Access to services is dependent upon access to a provider, but 75% of New Yorkers live in a designated psychiatrist shortage area and three rural upstate counties do not have a single psychiatrist.<sup>67</sup> Primary care is another example of the workforce shortage. There is a significant disparity between upstate and downstate in access to primary care. Counties in upstate New York have fewer specialty primary health care providers per capita than the statewide average – 22% fewer pediatric providers per capita, 14% fewer women’s health providers per capita, and 37% fewer geriatric providers per capita.

New York is pursuing a waiver from the federal government to secure hundreds of millions of dollars in multi-year funding to launch new initiatives that will support workforce recruitment and retention. The state will fund new training and education programs that focus on both career advancement and recruiting new members of the workforce. These training programs will be overseen by three high-performing Workforce Investment Organizations to ensure that training and educational institutions, healthcare providers, and trainees establish necessary partnerships and are effectively coordinated. In addition, the state will launch a new loan repayment program for psychiatrists, primary care physicians, dentists, nurse practitioners, and pediatric clinical nurse specialists who make a 4-year commitment to serve the Medicaid population in New York.

### *Support New Yorkers Entering the Healthcare Workforce*

Recruiting new workers into the healthcare field is essential, yet there are significant costs and other barriers facing aspiring healthcare workers. As a result, the supply of projected program graduates is less than the projected need for critical positions including certified nursing assistants, registered nurses, and licensed practical nurses.<sup>68</sup> Recognizing this fact, in Governor Hochul’s 2022 State of the State, she announced grant programs to support

students training in the healthcare field and debt forgiveness initiatives for doctors and nurses in underserved communities. There has been substantial progress made in these initiatives, but there is additional work to do in the coming years.

The Center for Healthcare Workforce Innovation, recently established at Governor Hochul's direction, has awarded funding to support 28 facilities to prepare, mentor, and train a steady pipeline of high-quality healthcare professionals. This year, the office will accept applications to increase training opportunities for healthcare workers statewide. The Nurses Across New York program will continue providing debt forgiveness for those serving medically underserved areas for at least three years and will be expanded to target nurses working with specific populations, such as behavioral healthcare and people with developmental disabilities. Finally, the Department of Health will launch a grant program to fund wraparound services like transportation or childcare for students training in the healthcare field.

#### *Allow Healthcare Providers to Do More*

New York's healthcare workers are trained professionals that provide critical services for New Yorker's every day, but they are limited in the services they are allowed to provide by the duties permitted under their license, also known as their "scope of practice." Because of the healthcare workforce shortage, it is essential to make common sense changes to laws governing scope of practice that allow the existing healthcare workforce to do even more for New Yorkers.

Governor Hochul will advance legislation to enter New York into the Interstate Licensure Compact and Nurse Licensure Compact, which will make it easier for physicians, psychologists, and nurses licensed in other states to practice in New York, either physically or virtually. In addition, Governor Hochul will advance legislation to expand scope of practice, to allow: certified nurses with additional training to administer basic medications in long-term care settings, to free up licensed nurse time to perform more advanced tasks; physicians' assistants with sufficient training to practice independently in primary care and

hospital settings, which will make more independent practitioners available to serve New Yorkers; and medical assistants to administer immunizations, which will expand the number of practitioners available to do this critical work.

### *Improve Transparency of Home Care Services*

Home care is rapidly growing in New York, and spending on these services outpaces the overall Medicaid program. The home care workforce has grown 44% over the past five years, relative to only 7% growth in health care workers over the same period.<sup>69</sup> However, data around these services is not readily available, which makes it difficult to analyze or understand these trends and plan appropriately for the future.

The Governor has directed the Department of Health to provide publicly available data around home care services, which will include information about agencies providing home care, the populations they are serving, and the services these populations are accessing. This will improve transparency around this rapidly growing field of healthcare in New York.

### **Increase Affordability and Accessibility**

New York is a nation-leader in health insurance coverage, ranking 9<sup>th</sup> with an insured rate of over 95%.<sup>70</sup> New York's Medicaid program is one the most generous in the country, covering 7.6 million people – 3<sup>rd</sup> in the nation as a percent of state population<sup>71</sup> – and ranking 9<sup>th</sup> in the country in spending per Medicaid member.<sup>72</sup> In addition, New York is one of only two states that offers a Basic Health Plan (the “Essential Plan”), which provides affordable and comprehensive coverage for 1.2 million low-income New Yorkers who are not eligible for Medicaid.<sup>73</sup> And more than 200,000 New Yorkers receive subsidized coverage through Qualified Health Plans under the Affordable Care Act.

Yet many New Yorkers are still unable to access high quality and affordable care. For New Yorkers who lack health insurance coverage, healthcare costs can be prohibitive. In

addition, even those with insurance may not receive adequate care, due to remaining cost sharing requirements, lack of coverage for the specific services they need, lack of adequate access to healthcare providers, or other factors.

38% of New Yorkers report sacrificing healthcare because of costs – for example, by delaying or avoiding doctor visits, not filling prescriptions, or foregoing recommended testing. 68% of New Yorkers are not very confident that they would be able to afford healthcare costs related to a major illness. And affordability is an equity issue – this percentage rises to 71% of Black New Yorkers, 76% of Latino/Hispanic New Yorkers, and 78% of New Yorkers with income less than \$30,000 per year.<sup>74</sup>

At the same time, lack of access to healthcare providers can inhibit New Yorkers' inability to find the care they need. For example, New York ranks 43<sup>rd</sup> in the nation with only 36% enough primary care providers to meet the state's full need.<sup>75</sup> And access varies widely across the state – Central New York, the region with the most primary care providers per capita in the state, has almost 30% more providers per capita than the Mid-Hudson region, which has the fewest.<sup>76</sup>

### *Expand Coverage for Health-Related Social Needs*

Medicaid provides comprehensive health insurance to 7.6 million New Yorkers<sup>77</sup>, covering a broad range of medical services, including primary care, specialist visits, emergency care and hospital visits, long-term care, pharmacy benefits, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and more. New York has much to be proud of in its Medicaid program, which is among the nation-leaders in the percentage of New Yorkers covered<sup>78</sup> and the quality of benefits offered. But improving the health and well-being of New Yorkers requires more than just medical care. New Yorkers need and deserve to have their health-related social needs also met – in areas such as housing, food and nutrition, and transportation. Without appropriate services in these areas, New Yorkers are significantly more likely to end up in poor health.<sup>79</sup>

New York is pursuing a waiver from the federal government to allow New York's Medicaid program to significantly expand coverage for health-related social needs for Medicaid beneficiaries. This waiver will allow New York to make the largest Medicaid health-related social needs investment in the entire country. Through this waiver, New York will unlock billions of dollars in funding to make services that have been shown to improve health and well-being in the long run significantly more affordable, thereby improving quality of life for New Yorkers and averting the need for costly and invasive medical care. These services will include housing supports (e.g. medical respite, medically necessary home modifications, and other tenancy sustaining services), food and nutrition (e.g. temporary support for nutrition counseling, home delivered meals, and fruit and vegetable deliveries), and transportation (e.g. reimbursement for transportation required to connect with social services).

#### *Expand Access to Quality Dental Care*

Oral health is critical to overall health and well-being, yet low-income New Yorkers are significantly more likely to face a dental issue and less likely to have visited a dentist in the last 12 months.<sup>13</sup> Whereas 70% of adult New Yorkers have visited the dentist in the last year, only 30% of Medicaid enrollees have.<sup>14</sup> This is partially due to the fact that not all dentists participate in public insurance programs. In 2020, only 36% of dentists accepted Medicaid or Medicare.<sup>80</sup> With continued concerns around limited access to oral health care services and growing national awareness about long-term negative health consequences, New York is committed to addressing the historic gaps in dental care access and coverage for marginalized New Yorkers.

Governor Hochul will take several steps to increase access to better oral health services.

First, New York will support the dentistry workforce by expanding their scope of practice and launching a new loan repayment program, supported by a federal waiver, for dentists who make a four-year commitment to serve the Medicaid population in New York.

Governor Hochul will also work to increase access to high quality dental care by expanding access to dental care in school-based health centers, incentivizing Medicaid managed care

plans to contract with more dentists, increasing quality oversight of dental care within Medicaid, and implementing a provider education campaign.

### *Increase Children's Access to Healthcare*

It is essential that New York provides adequate access to care for children – and we are not doing enough today. New York ranks 30th in the nation for children's well-being,<sup>81</sup> and consistently ranks poorly in prevention and treatment measures for children. For example, New York ranks 37<sup>th</sup> in children's vaccination rates, 30<sup>th</sup> in providing adequate mental health care for children, and 25<sup>th</sup> in ensuring children receive preventive medical and dental care.<sup>82</sup> And children on Medicaid may face additional barriers to accessing healthcare, as they may periodically lose and regain Medicaid eligibility, resulting in temporary loss of health coverage. This can reduce children's access to preventive and primary care, cause disruptions in continuity of health care services, and increase unmet health care needs.<sup>83</sup>

Governor Hochul will take several steps to expand access to high quality care for New York's children. First, in order to ensure that no child in need misses out on critical healthcare services due to a lapse in health insurance coverage, New York is submitting a waiver request to the federal government to provide continuous Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program coverage for any eligible child between the ages of 0 and 6 years old. Second, to expand access to primary care for children, New York will increase funding for school-based health centers and provide an incremental rate increase for providers serving children through New York's Patient-Centered Medical Home model. To ensure children have access to specialized services they may require, New York will provide for additional support for providers participating in the State's Early Intervention program for children and toddlers with disabilities, and Department of Health-licensed providers and private practitioners treating children's mental health needs. New York State will also create a new and streamlined designation process for Children and Family Treatment and Support Services to make it easier for more providers to provide these critical mental health services for children. The State will also provide grant funding to community-based

organizations that are making investments in improving the quality of life for children with special needs. To better help children manage asthma, New York will expand the efforts of the New York State Children’s Asthma Initiative to train the healthcare workforce in delivering multidisciplinary care across multiple settings. Finally, Governor Hochul will amend the Reproductive Health Act to affirm minors’ right to receive contraceptive services and confidentially receive reproductive health care services.

### *Expand Access to Primary Care*

In last year’s State of the State, Governor Hochul highlighted the need to further expand access to primary care within New York. New York ranks 28<sup>th</sup> in the nation for providing Prevention and Treatment and 44<sup>th</sup> in the nation for Avoidable Hospital Use & Cost.<sup>84</sup> When access to primary care is limited, patients suffer poorer health outcomes and must resort to greater utilization of hospitals and emergency rooms.<sup>85</sup> And these issues are more pronounced amongst Medicaid members than other New Yorkers. Medicaid members are less likely to receive routine immunizations, access primary care, and effectively manage medical issues than those on commercial insurance.<sup>86</sup> Primary care spending as a percentage of total Medicaid spending has significantly declined – from 12.8% in 2015 to 8.1% in 2020.<sup>87</sup> As a result, last year, Governor Hochul announced a variety of actions, including increased Medicaid reimbursement rates for primary care.

Building on last year’s actions, New York will take several steps to further advance primary care access. First, in order to broaden access and drive more comprehensive and coordinated care for all Medicaid members, New York will increase Medicaid rates for providers participating in New York’s innovative primary care model (Patient-Centered Medical Homes). Second, to better integrate and coordinate mental health services with primary care, New York will increase support for Department of Health-licensed facilities and private practices treating mental health conditions. New York will also expand coverage for Adverse Childhood Experiences Screening to all adults enrolled in Medicaid. Finally, to ensure access to care for adults with complex needs, the State will increase

support for healthcare providers serving individuals with physical, intellectual, or developmental disabilities.

*Increase the Affordability of New York State of Health Insurance Options*

In 2023, Governor Hochul submitted a waiver request to the federal government to raise the income limit for Essential Plan eligibility from 200 to 250% of the federal poverty line (up to \$36,450 income per year for an individual<sup>88</sup>) – once implemented, this expansion is expected to expand affordable coverage in the Essential Plan to an additional 100,000 New Yorkers. But for many New Yorkers, the rising cost of health insurance premiums and other out-of-pocket costs as well as certain benefit limits are ongoing barriers to accessing the care they need.

Governor Hochul will take steps to address these barriers through changes to the *New York State of Health's* Essential Plan and Qualified Health Plans. First, New York will offer new health insurance premium subsidies to New Yorkers enrolled in Qualified Health Plans to ensure more people have access to affordable insurance coverage. Second, New York will eliminate cost-sharing in both the Essential Plan and Qualified Health Plans for office visits, laboratory work and testing, pharmaceuticals, and other supplies and services to promote better management of chronic conditions such as Type 2 Diabetes. Third, the Essential Plan will expand coverage of services to mitigate public health risks due to the escalating threat of climate change, providing coverage for the purchase, delivery, and installation of air conditioners for members for whom persistent asthma poses a significant medical risk. Fourth, to ensure that Essential Plan and Qualified Health Plan members have access to the healthcare providers they need, the Department of Health and the Department of Financial Services will establish a workgroup to revisit and update provider network adequacy standards.

*Appoint a Director of Patient Advocacy*



As the State invests to expand the availability of healthcare programs and protections for New Yorkers, many patients can have trouble navigating the system. Many New Yorkers frequently struggle with the myriad of complexities and intricacies of the American healthcare system, including billing, insurance, and program eligibility. The result is a patient population overly burdened by difficult and often confusing choices that leave them vulnerable to inadequate care and affordability challenges.

To ensure that patients remain at the center of all the State's healthcare programs and policies, the Department of Health will appoint a Director of Patient Advocacy (DPA). The DPA will work across programs to help streamline and simplify information and processes for patients. The DPA will also work to uphold New York's Hospital Patients' Bill of Rights, which guarantees all New Yorkers the right to transparency, autonomy, and respect at all levels of their care.

### **Improve Public Health for All New Yorkers**

New York State continues to make immense progress in improving the health and well-being of New Yorkers over the last two decades, moving from 40<sup>th</sup> in the nation in 1990, to 28<sup>th</sup> in 2008, to 10<sup>th</sup> in 2018.<sup>89</sup> Despite this progress, New York State still faces significant challenges. More than 40% of New York adults suffer from a chronic disease – such as asthma, cancer, heart disease, and more – and chronic diseases are responsible for 23% of all hospitalizations in New York State.<sup>90</sup> Six out of every ten deaths in New York State are caused by chronic diseases, and heart disease and cancer account for more than half of all deaths in New York State.<sup>91</sup> The health of New Yorkers is unfortunately not equitable – historically marginalized communities, including communities of color and those with special needs, are more greatly impacted by the health and safety of their environment and accessibility to quality care and services.

New York State has made strides in eliminating preventable epidemics, with the goal of decreasing the number of people living with diagnosed HIV. However, the state faces many outstanding public health challenges, especially in vulnerable populations. 74% of new HIV

diagnoses are for Black and Hispanic individuals, despite those groups accounting for only 34% of the population.<sup>92</sup> There are five to 13 more deaths per 100,000 people from opioid overdoses for Black and Hispanic individuals than for white individuals.<sup>93</sup> Despite efforts to create safer and healthier environments, gun violence impacts black and brown communities at higher rates than white communities.<sup>94</sup> While New York State continues to improve its public health infrastructure, remaining information gaps undermine the State's ability to do even more to meet both the emergent and non-emergent needs of New Yorkers. In addition, dated and paper-based systems continue to create burdens and privacy concerns for healthcare providers and New Yorkers.

### *End Preventable Epidemics*

Since 2014, New York State has laid the groundwork for ending preventable epidemics through the Ending the Epidemic (ETE) initiative – a plan to end the AIDS epidemic and achieve the first ever decrease in people living with diagnosed HIV. In 2022, there were 2,318 New Yorkers newly diagnosed with HIV, a 38% decrease in new diagnoses compared to 2012.<sup>95</sup> Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), a cornerstone of the ETE, has shown to reduce HIV acquisition by more than 90%.<sup>96,97,98</sup> Last year, Governor Hochul took action to prevent a rise in Congenital Syphilis by requiring third trimester screenings during pregnancy and introduced legislation to screen more New Yorkers for Hepatitis C, including pregnant persons. However, despite tremendous impact, progress has not been achieved equitably across all groups – there are still pronounced disparities specifically among women, non-Hispanic Black, and Hispanic populations.<sup>99</sup>

Governor Hochul will take several steps to advance the State's efforts to end preventable epidemics. Governor Hochul will require labs to report all negative HIV, Syphilis, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C test results to improve targeted interventions and address gaps in testing. The Governor will also propose legislation to make HIV testing a routine part of an annual visit.

To make it easier for New Yorkers to access care and prevent further transmission, the Governor will propose legislation to allow pharmacists to administer vaccines, screen, and dispense medication for MPOX and PrEP, and expand the role of registered nurses to facilitate Hepatitis B testing.

To fulfill the State's commitment to eliminating Hepatitis C by 2030, Governor Hochul will invest in the integration of Hepatitis C prevention in opioid prevention services, provide funding to local health departments to support disease surveillance, and invest in innovative Hepatitis C care models to support people who inject drugs. Finally, to address inequities, Governor Hochul will invest in increasing PrEP uptake in communities of color through targeted interventions and innovative delivery models like telehealth and learning collaboratives.

### *Protect New Yorkers from Opioid Overdose*

The opioid crisis continues to devastate individuals, families, and communities across New York State. In 2022, approximately 5,300 New Yorkers died from opioid-related overdose, as compared to 5,017 in 2021, and 4,233 in 2020.<sup>100</sup> More than 25 New Yorkers per 100,000 died from opioid overdoses, compared to five in 2010.<sup>101</sup> Illicit fentanyl has become a primary driver of these deaths – synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, contributed to more than 88% of overdose deaths in 2022.<sup>102</sup> Xylazine, a non-opioid veterinary sedative that is often mixed with fentanyl, is becoming increasingly prevalent and was involved in 1 in 5 opioid-involved overdose deaths in New York City.<sup>103</sup>

Governor Hochul has taken an “all hands-on deck” approach to tackling this crisis, leveraging the full continuum of addiction and health programming and engaging other critical partners, including law enforcement. From 2016 to 2022, New York State decreased opioid prescription rates by 36%, increased access to buprenorphine treatment for those with opioid use disorder by 33%<sup>104</sup>, and greatly expanded public access to lifesaving training and tools including naloxone and drug testing supplies. Governor Hochul is committed to continuing to make these efforts a priority.

To tackle this crisis, New York is leading the nation in terms of both the amount of – and speed at which – funds have been made available through settlements reached with opioid manufacturers. Guided by recommendations made by the Opioid Settlement Fund Advisory Board, in 2023, Governor Hochul made \$192.8 million available to support organizations offering critical prevention, treatment, harm reduction and recovery services to address opioid use disorder. New York has over \$200 million more opioid settlement dollars to spend from Fiscal Year 2024, and, jointly led by the administrator of the State’s settlement funds – the Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) – and the Office of Mental Health (OMH) and the Department of Health (DOH), the State will continue to work to make sure this funding has the greatest impact possible.

Key initiatives that will be prioritized with opioid settlement funding in 2024 include: programs to support and bolster the addiction workforce; investments in the most vulnerable and underserved communities, including continuing to enhance Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) services in correctional settings, addressing services gaps with innovative service delivery mechanisms, and expanding the reach of outreach and engagement efforts to link unengaged and unhoused individuals to critical programs and services; targeted investments through a regional approach that addresses service gaps and maximizes the effectiveness of available resources; and increased harm reduction efforts, including expanding low-threshold buprenorphine access, as well as disseminating millions of additional fentanyl and xylazine test strips and naloxone medication.

To maximize all opportunities within her purview, Governor Hochul will take a range of additional steps to address this crisis on all fronts.

- To continue to implement a ‘no-wrong door approach’ and promote service integration between behavioral health and primary healthcare, the Governor will continue her commitment to triple the number of Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers (CCBHCs) statewide in 2024. Additional crisis stabilization centers – jointly licensed by OMH and OASAS – will also continue to come online in 2024.
- To stop the illegal distribution of deadly opioids and additives, Governor Hochul will propose legislation to update the State’s controlled substances schedule to include

new fentanyl analogs, xylazine, and other prescription medications. The Governor will also instruct the Department of Agriculture and Markets to launch a Veterinary Xylazine Diversion Education Program to prevent xylazine from being diverted from legitimate veterinary uses.

- To provide more public education and to reduce the stigma that remains a barrier to expanding and ensuring access to life-saving services, the State will launch a robust, multi-faceted anti-stigma campaign to raise awareness about opioid use disorder and the services needed to support those in need.
- To improve treatment for those in need, Governor Hochul will introduce legislation to permit health care providers in emergency rooms to dispense up to a three-day supply of buprenorphine and increase funding for treatment in the State's Essential Plan.
- The Governor will reestablish a pain management working group that will inform best practices, guideline changes, and suggest non-pharmacological ways for patients to cope with pain management.
- To ensure the voice of individuals with lived experience is heard and considered in making financial and programmatic decisions, OASAS will convene the newly formed Lived Experience Advisory Panel. This group will serve as an advisory body to the Commissioner on issues related to prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery services for substance use disorder and problem gambling.
- After bringing several Mobile Medication Units (MMUs) online in the past year to expand access to life-saving medication services for individuals with opioid use disorder, OASAS will launch additional MMUs in 2024. MMUs allow medication to be brought into communities that may not otherwise have access to brick-and-mortar services. This builds on the State's commitment to expand access to underserved areas using innovative treatment models.
- In order to improve surveillance and data-driven interventions, Governor Hochul will also direct DOH to synthesize data across its multiple information systems and

propose legislation to increase the retention period for data contained in the prescription drug monitoring program.

### *Reduce Gun Violence Through a Public Health Approach*

New York State has been a leading voice in the national discourse around gun violence prevention. In Governor Hochul's action plan to prevent and reduce gun violence throughout New York State, the Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP) was created in the New York State Department of Health to operate as the coordinating body for efforts across the state, bringing together key partners in the community, local municipalities, and state agencies to identify and implement a public health approach to curb gun violence in New York State.

Gun violence is the leading cause of premature death in the United States, costing the country approximately \$557 billion per year and New York approximately \$11.4 billion per year. In 2020, firearms became the leading cause of death for children under 19, surpassing traffic accidents for the first time ever. Guns are the leading method of suicide in the U.S., accounting for half of all suicide deaths. Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) across New York State have endured a disproportionate burden of gun violence, with Black New Yorkers being 10 times more likely to be killed with a gun than their white counterparts.<sup>105</sup>

Governor Hochul will direct the Department of Health's OGVP to implement a comprehensive set of strategies aimed at preventing gun violence. New York State will convene a Health Systems for Gun Violence Prevention Taskforce, charged with focusing on data infrastructure, firearm injury risk assessment screening, and hospital violence intervention strategies. The State will provide technical assistance to community-based organizations and hospitals across the state to align their hospital violence intervention programs with the recently signed Medicaid Reimbursement for Violence Prevention Programs legislation, which allows Medicaid beneficiaries impacted by community violence to receive violence prevention services from qualified community health workers.

New York State will also continue building public awareness to change the narrative on gun violence to discourage perpetuating stereotypes based on race and class that exacerbate racial injustice and health inequity. Building upon Governor Hochul's expansion of the Red Flag Law in June 2022 that allowed healthcare providers to file an Extreme Risk Protection Order petition to prevent individuals who show signs of being a threat to themselves or others from accessing any kind of firearm, New York State will offer training and awareness for healthcare providers. New York State will continue to invest in community-led youth programs in historically under-resourced communities that experience the highest rates of gun violence. Finally, New York State will create a syndromic surveillance system for firearm-related injuries and a dashboard for the public.

#### *Modernize Vital Records to Meet the Needs of New Yorkers*

New York State's Bureau of Vital Records (BVR) is an integral resource to New Yorkers, managing approximately 40 million birth, death, fetal death, marriage, and divorce records dating back to 1881, with over 450,000 new records added each year. Vital records are used to document identity and citizenship, helping New Yorkers acquire a passport or driver's license, enroll a child in school or obtain benefits and services such as Social Security. Vital records data are foundational for the monitoring of the health of a population and used extensively for public health surveillance and epidemiology.

Exacerbated by the pandemic, the Bureau of Vital Records has a significant lag on processing record requests and the current mail-in ordering of vital records requests is manual and time-consuming. To meet the needs of New Yorkers, the Bureau must significantly invest resources to locate records quickly and efficiently, cut request times dramatically, and eliminate the backlog.

Governor Hochul will direct the Department of Health to digitize records that are not yet electronic and implement intelligent document software to create a searchable system to automatically extract information. New York State will leverage these new systems to

address the existing backlog and create improved processes and response times to ensure New Yorkers can access their vital records with ease and accuracy.

### *Alleviate Burden and Data Privacy Concerns for Abortion Providers*

Since the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, Governor Hochul has sought to ensure New York State is a safe harbor for those who provide or seek abortion care. As part of last year's budget, Governor Hochul announced major actions to protect abortion access, including increased Medicaid reimbursement rates, additional data protections for patients seeking reproductive care, coverage of medication abortion by private insurers when prescribed off-label, and \$100.7 million in new funding to support abortion providers and reproductive health care. Governor Hochul also signed legislation to allow pharmacists to dispense over-the-counter contraception and to ensure all public colleges and universities in the SUNY and CUNY systems offer access to medication abortion.

Still, abortion providers face administrative burdens and share concerns about data privacy, exacerbated by the increased demand and attention on abortion care services. To alleviate these burdens and data privacy concerns, Governor Hochul will direct the Department of Health to modernize technology for the electronic reporting of induced termination of pregnancy instances in order to eliminate the replication of information from paper to electronic form and provide safeguards for sensitive abortion-related information.

### *Invest in Clinical Care and Research for Rare Diseases*

Rare diseases – difficult to identify, diagnose, and treat – impact many New Yorkers. While these diseases are individually rare, collectively they impact almost 10% of Americans. And of the 7,000 identified rare diseases, less than 10% have approved treatments.<sup>106</sup> Patients with rare diseases are typically underserved by our healthcare system, as well as by public and private research organizations that fail to meet the specific needs of this patient



population. Moreover, the limited numbers of patients diagnosed with rare diseases creates little incentive for commercial drug developers to invest in these disorders, given the difficulty in generating a profit in this space. For this reason, the challenge of studying and treating rare diseases often falls to non-profits and governments.

Governor Hochul will take steps to catalyze innovation in rare diseases, in both clinical care and research infrastructures, to address the unmet need in this area and to inform our approach to not just those rare diseases, but also more common disorders. To jumpstart this effort, New York State will deploy funding targeted towards Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), an aggressive neurodegenerative disease with a typical survival rate ranging from two to five years. Funding will be used to create a comprehensive program to enable further innovation, research, drug development, and investment in this disease space, and to establish a model for other rare disease communities to follow. Governor Hochul will also build upon the State's work to date in rare diseases by establishing a permanent Rare Disease Advisory Council to develop a statewide approach to combating the effects of these diseases.

## **SECTION 15: ADVANCING EQUITY AND WELLBEING FOR ALL NEW YORKERS**

Over the last two years, Governor Hochul has championed policies and made investments to support families and lift up the most marginalized New Yorkers. In addition to taking the first steps to enshrine equal rights into the New York State Constitution and, most recently, establishing a commission to study reparations, Governor Hochul has put equity at the center of the Administration's work across all agencies and initiatives.

In addition, last year's budget included significant measures that will have an outsize positive impact on low- and moderate-income families across the state. In addition to an historic increase in the Empire State Child Credit, which extends benefits to families with children under four – a policy change expected to support more than 600,000 children – the budget also raised the income limit for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to the maximum allowable under federal law, opening up access to care to over 100,000 additional families.

This year, Governor Hochul will continue to take action to break down barriers to stability and equity and support greater inclusion – both social and economic – for communities across the state.

### **Support Lower-Income New Yorkers**

#### *Expand Summer Meals Program to Reduce Hunger*

For many families with children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, the summer months can bring the added pressure of higher grocery needs and costs. To reduce hunger and food insecurity among these families, New York State will opt in to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program for Children (Summer EBT).

As a result, more than \$200 million in federal benefits will be provided to an estimated two million children in New York State.

*Provide More Intensive Support to Families in Need*

Local departments of social services play an important role in connecting New York families to public benefits for which they are eligible. To offer greater support to families as a unit and help address any larger challenges they may be facing to their well-being or ability to attain financial stability beyond access to benefits, New York will provide funding to local departments of social services to support hiring staff to provide wrap-around services and case management. These staff may provide in-depth clinical assessments, crisis intervention, and make referrals to mental health providers or other appropriate services or treatment, as needed.

*Support Anti-Poverty Efforts in Upstate Cities*

Nine of the top ten New York State zip codes with the highest child poverty rates are in upstate cities. More than half of children in these zip codes are in families living below the federal poverty line, and these cities rank among those with the highest child poverty rates nationwide. To support locally-driven efforts to address the immediate needs of these children and families, Governor Hochul will fund selected anti-poverty initiatives proposed by upstate cities in the coming fiscal year.

**Continue Commitment to Child Care Access**

*Provide Grants to Sustain Child Care Programs*

Building off of last year's investment of federal pandemic funds for the child care workforce, New York will again invest underutilized federal pandemic funds to continue

providing grants to child care programs to support their workforce. Grants can be used for retention and referral bonuses for existing staff as well as sign-on bonuses for new staff.

#### *Pilot Family Child Care Networks*

Family and group family child care providers operate small programs out of their homes for the children in their communities and care for a significant share of children in families participating in the Child Care Assistance Program. To expand business and operational support for family child care programs, staffed by a majority-women workforce, New York will pilot staffed Family Child Care Networks (FCCNs) in regions around the state, with a focus on supporting and growing the capacity of family and group family child care providers.

#### *Expand Early Childhood Mental Health Consultations*

Supporting child care providers in the development of young minds is crucial to the wellbeing of both the providers and the youth in their care. Currently, there are Infant Toddler Mental Health Consultants (ITMHCs) located throughout the state at seven regional infant and toddler resource centers. These ITMHCs support infant and toddler programs and providers, using a preventive approach to support the provider and improve the program environment. In order to serve more programs and providers, New York will double the amount of consultants statewide.

#### *Reimburse Child Care Providers for Quality Improvement*

To support more child care providers in efforts to increase program quality, the Office of Children and Families (OCFS) will increase the differential payment rate for high-quality providers that are accredited by a nationally recognized child care organization, participate

in New York's Quality Rating & Improvement System, or have completed training and are an active participant in the OCFS Non-Patient Epinephrine Auto-Injector Initiative.

## **Commit to Indigenous Nations**

### *Strengthen Stability of Indigenous Families*

The 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is a federal law created to protect the best interests of Native American children involved in child custody proceedings. The law emerged as a response to the disproportionate rates at which both residential boarding schools and state actors removed Native American children from their homes, communities, and Indigenous Nations. Seven boarding schools for Indigenous children operated in New York in the 141 years between 1816 and 1957, and the effects of these schools continue to reverberate throughout New York's contemporary Indigenous communities. This year, New York's Deputy Secretary for First Nations and the Office of Children and Family Services, will advance, in consultation with Nation leadership and stakeholders, strategies to strengthen the objectives of the Indian Child Welfare Act, underscoring New York's commitment to redressing injustices inflicted upon Indigenous communities.

### *Fund Dental Care for First Nations*

The prevalence of early childhood oral disease in Native American communities is up to three times higher than for their non-Indigenous counterparts. Native American adults are twice as likely as the overall U.S. population to have untreated tooth decay, and they seek emergency care for dental/oral complications at a rate of three and a half times the national average. Up to 83% of American Indian adults experience tooth loss – a nearly 20% higher prevalence than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Indigenous peoples also have higher rates of diabetic periodontal disease and oral carcinomas than their non-

Indigenous counterparts, as well as twice the national rate of the occurrence of cleft palates.

All of these conditions warrant more regular monitoring before they become life threatening or debilitating health issues. Currently, only basic services are provided at many First Nations' dental offices, and providers frequently must refer patients off-site and far distances away from Nation territories for specialty services, posing new hardships incurred during the treatment of these health conditions. This year, Governor Hochul will support funding for First Nations dental health care, with the aim of addressing gaps in access.

### *Respond to Offensive Representations of Indigenous Peoples*

All New Yorkers should feel welcome and respected when visiting the State Capitol. Unfortunately, offensive imagery and distasteful representations of populations in the art which adorns the Capitol can alienate visitors. Indigenous peoples, in particular, are often depicted in artworks in a manner that reflects harmful racial stereotypes and glorifies violence against Indigenous peoples. Such depictions do not reflect the values of New York State.

Assessments of offensive artistic representations of Indigenous peoples are informed by precedent more than eighty years old. To ensure that all New Yorkers are welcomed in the Capitol, this year Governor Hochul will commence a comprehensive review of artistic representation of Indigenous peoples in the Capitol, with invited participation from representatives from each of the nine Indigenous Nations.

### **Commit to All New Yorkers with Disabilities**

*Issue Olmstead Plan for All People with Disabilities*

In 2024, New York's Most Integrated Setting Coordinating Council will issue an Olmstead plan to ensure that all people with disabilities receive services in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs. Under the direction of the Office of the Chief Disability Officer and its new Olmstead director, and following community outreach, this plan will include people with physical, sensory, developmental and/or intellectual, mental and behavioral disabilities.

### *Support Access to Employment*

Employment for people with disabilities lags far behind the general population. According to the U.S. Department of Labor Disability Employment Statistics, in 2023, 41.5% of people with disabilities between ages 16 and 64 are participating in the workforce, compared to 77.8% of people without disabilities.<sup>107</sup> New York remains below the U.S. average with only 36.9% (2021) of people with disabilities participating in the workforce, compared to 73.8% of people without disabilities.<sup>108</sup> The poverty rate among working-age New Yorkers with a disability is more than double those without a disability.

To address this challenge, Governor Hochul will issue an Executive Order committing New York to being an Employment First State as it pertains to people with disabilities, joining 32 other states with Employment First guiding principles in place.<sup>109</sup> This will build on the Governor's 2023 signing of Executive Order 31, which committed to making New York State a model employer for people with disabilities.

### *Support Access to More Independent Living Settings*

Currently, Direct Support Professionals in non-certified care settings, such as in OPWDD's self-direction program, can only perform certain nursing tasks under the supervision of a registered nurse. This requirement places an undue burden on people with developmental disabilities who would like to live independently, but who require minimal nursing support on a routine basis. This year, Governor Hochul will pursue legislation that will expand the

tasks direct support professionals can perform, thereby allowing more people with developmental disabilities to remain in or transition to more independent settings and decreasing the reliance on certified residential settings. This will result in improved community inclusion and personal outcomes.

## **Support New York Veterans**

### *Develop Pocket Card for Providers Serving Veterans*

Many medical professionals provide critical health care to veterans, but often lack training or awareness of military cultural competency that can be crucial for effectively interacting with and caring for veterans. To help address this gap, the Department of Veterans' Services – in partnership with New York's delegation to the national Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and Military Families – will develop a "pocket card" containing information that medical professionals should know when working with a veteran patient. This card can then be shared with medical professionals around the state to help improve interactions with and health outcomes for veteran patients in New York.

### *Create Statewide Women Veterans History Trail*

New York State is home to more than 62,000 women veterans. To honor the extraordinary legacy of women veterans in New York's history, the Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) will develop a statewide Women's Veterans History Trail. Curated by DVS, with input from county and city historians, researchers, Veterans Service Organizations, and local veterans service agencies, the Women Veterans History Trail will showcase sites and stories that highlight the contributions of women in military service throughout New York State's history.



### *Support Mental Health of Women Veterans*

The women veteran population is the fastest-growing segment within the U.S. veteran community and is expected to comprise 15 percent of the total by 2035. However, women veterans face disproportionately higher rates of suicide compared to both non-veteran women and their male veteran counterparts. To help address the mental health needs of New York's women veterans, the Department of Veterans' Services will collaborate with partner agencies and stakeholders to create a specialized toolkit and training program focused on providing mental health support for women veterans. These materials will be made available to veterans benefits advisors, veterans service officers, and Veterans Service Organizations around the state who provide direct services to women veterans in New York.

### **Strengthen New York's Response to Discrimination and Hate**

#### *Expedite Resolutions to Discrimination Complaints*

The New York State Division of Human Rights received more than 7,000 complaints of discrimination during fiscal year 2023. To help ensure that more New Yorkers can access justice swiftly, DHR will launch a new pilot program to identify cases that may be resolved through an early mediation intervention. Working with trained mediators from Community Dispute Resolution Centers across the state, this initiative will allow parties to voluntarily participate in mediation that can help resolve complaints faster and with fewer costs than is typically possible through the formal complaint adjudication process.

#### *Launch Youth Anti-Hate and -Bias Initiative*

Young people are often directly impacted by hate and bias incidents, and their voices and experiences are critical to shaping the future of combating hate in our state. To help empower New York's young people and engage them in programs to be catalysts for positive change in their communities, the Division of Human Rights' Hate and Bias

Prevention Unit will launch a dedicated youth initiative to engage young New Yorkers around the state in advancing the Unit's mission while supporting the next generation of anti-hate and -bias leaders.

### **Strengthen Services for LGBTQ+ New Yorkers**

#### *Expand Funding for Workforce Development and Training for TGNCNB New Yorkers*

In 2022, Governor Hochul and the Legislature took an important step to support the TGNCNB community and address disparities in access to important programs and services by establishing the Lorena Borjas Transgender and Non-binary Wellness and Equity Fund (TWEF). The Fiscal Year 2023 Enacted Budget included \$3 million in funding to support this initiative, and in 2023 Governor Hochul announced an additional \$1 million in youth suicide prevention funding expanding TWEF, as well as an additional \$5 million in funding for gender affirming senior housing projects that support TGNCNB individuals.

This year, following the New York State Department of Labor's recent Transgender Employment Study highlighting numerous obstacles to finding and maintaining employment faced by TGNCNB New Yorkers, ranging from lack of access to training opportunities to experiencing discrimination in hiring process and in the workplace, Governor Hochul will propose an additional \$1 million expansion to the TWEF to support TGNCNB-targeted workforce development programming. This investment will make New York a national leader in supporting the wellness and equity of TGNCNB individuals through community investments. The Governor's action further reinforces the intent of the fund to uplift the TGNCNB community through intersectional services supporting improved access to a wide range of programs and opportunities.

#### *Enhance Gender Affirming Care for TGNCNB New Yorkers*

Transgender and gender diverse individuals often face challenges and barriers to accessing necessary and affirming health services and face worse health outcomes than the general

public. Ensuring access to gender affirming care for transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary (TGNCNB) individuals improves mental and physical health outcomes. New York State has long been a leader in providing access to such care, and as more states around the country take steps to restrict access, it is important for New York State to reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that TGNCNB individuals can find gender affirming care in our state.

To ensure that TGNCNB individuals can access the highest quality affirming care in New York, Governor Hochul will direct the Department of Health to update New York State Medicaid's coverage requirements to align with the newest version of the Standards of Care for the Health of Transgender and Gender Diverse People, removing unnecessary barriers to affirming care. In addition, the Office of Mental Health will consult with the Departments of Health and Financial Services to issue new guidance to ensure that commercial insurers update medical necessity criteria to incorporate the newest version of the Standards of Care for the Health of Transgender and Gender Diverse People into their plans.

### *Strengthen LGBTQ+ Cultural Competency*

Ensuring that more New Yorkers understand the experience of LGBTQ+ individuals and feel comfortable with the use of respectful language relating to the LGBTQ+ community is an important step towards reducing incidents of perceived bias or discrimination. This is particularly important in settings where LGBTQ+ individuals are seeking access to important services or benefits. To expand opportunities for key providers to receive LGBTQ+ cultural competency training, the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance will for the first time make its LGBTQ+ cultural competency training available to local contracted service providers throughout the state and will continue to encourage all local departments of social services staff to complete the training.

### **Increase Chief Diversity Officers Across State Agencies**

A modern public sector workforce is one that is diverse, inclusive, and equitable. Research has shown that diverse and inclusive workplaces outperform their peers, are more successful at recruiting and retaining talent, are more innovative and able to solve problems, and employees have better job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Under Governor Hochul's leadership, New York has made significant strides in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, there is still more work to do to ensure that the state's public sector workforce reflects the diversity of New York and advances inclusion and equity for all.

In order to strengthen and increase capacity for diversity, equity, and inclusion across the New York State workforce, and ensure New York is leading by example, Governor Hochul will direct executive-controlled agencies with more than 300 full-time employees to hire a Chief Diversity Officer or other equivalent position that is dedicated full-time to diversity, equity, and inclusion work if the agency does not already have one. Additionally, Governor Hochul will direct the Office of Employee Relations, in collaboration with the Governor's Office of Diversity and Inclusion, to develop a DEI training for all State employees and the Department of Civil Service, in collaboration with the Governor's Office, to develop and provide anti-racism training.

## **SECTION 16: MAKING GOVERNMENT WORK BETTER**

New Yorkers deserve a government that delivers services efficiently and equitably and that prioritizes the user experience in the design of public goods and services. A government that gets this right is one that will meet the service needs of people of all backgrounds and abilities and save people time – and, in so doing, increase public confidence and trust.

In 2023, Governor Hochul announced a plan to make government work better for New Yorkers, zeroing in on strategies to reduce the “time tax” imposed when interacting with government agencies. To lead these efforts and to ensure that government services are designed to put the people’s needs first, the State appointed its first Chief Customer Experience Officer. Established to be the voice of New Yorkers in government decision making, the Customer Experience Office works on behalf of residents to fulfill the vision of a faster, simpler, and more equitable state government.

Building on last year’s bold agenda for transforming the way residents access services and benefits from State agencies, this year, Governor Hochul will accelerate customer experience (CX) improvements across the state in three key areas: (1) increasing access to public benefits; (2) expediting processing times for services; and (3) laying the foundation for a strong statewide customer experience infrastructure.

### **Improve Access to Benefits and Services**

#### *Use Data-Matching to Identify Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC) Eligible Families*

Many New Yorkers miss out on benefits for which they qualify. This happens for a variety of reasons, including lack of awareness of programs and complicated, confusing, and technologically challenging application processes. There is an opportunity to streamline coordination of benefits across state agencies to create an improved customer experience.

One proven intervention to increase benefits participation is the process of either automatically enrolling or targeting outreach to individuals who are known to be enrolled in one program but not in other programs for which they are eligible. This can be achieved through a process known as “data matching” across benefits programs where data sharing is permitted by federal law and regulation. An initial step requires developing data sharing legal agreements between program areas.

A 2019 study of four states that used data on federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid participation to increase federal WIC enrollment revealed cross-enrollment gaps ranging from 44% to 77%.<sup>1</sup> States are increasingly initiating data sharing systems to help close these gaps. For example, 29 state WIC agencies are using Medicaid and/or SNAP data to identify WIC enrollment gaps and 13 states are using Medicaid or SNAP data for outreach, with six more preparing to launch.<sup>2</sup>

In New York, about half of those eligible for WIC are actually enrolled. This year, the Department of Health will complete data sharing across the Medicaid and WIC programs, laying the infrastructure for future outreach to WIC-eligible residents who are not currently receiving benefits.

### *Launch Modern Housing Search System*

Governor Hochul is committed to providing affordable housing and increasing homeownership for New Yorkers. New York State’s Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) oversees a five-year, comprehensive plan to increase the state’s housing supply and preserve existing homes. HCR’s online search tool for connecting applicants to the affordable homes they finance has become outdated and can be confusing. To provide better access to available affordable housing, HCR will create a new public website where housing seekers will be able to find State-financed affordable units, determine if they qualify, and apply for those units- all in one place. Housing seekers will also be able to search by need, including for accessible homes, and homes for veterans or survivors of domestic violence.

### *Pilot Language Access Certification Program*

More than 5.7 million New Yorkers speak a language other than English at home. Under the language access law, agencies that provide direct public services are required to provide oral interpretation services in a person's primary language and translate vital documents related to offered services into the 12 most common languages spoken by individuals with limited English proficiency in New York State.

To lay the foundation for improved language access and build a pipeline of assessed and trained interpreters and translators, New York can leverage an untapped resource – the State workforce. Many members of New York State's workforce speak a language other than English and could help foster more culturally responsive interactions with government. To that end, the Office of Language Access will pilot a Language Access Certification program, which will offer language assessments and training for members of the State workforce that speak a language other than English and are interested in leveraging and honing their language skills. This initiative, in taking the first steps toward establishing an internal language bank, would confirm the bilingual proficiency of State employees, improve the quality of language services provided through training, and improve access for New Yorkers with limited English proficiency.

### **Expedite Processing Times for Services**

A key component of Governor Hochul's customer experience agenda is to streamline how New Yorkers access services and benefits. In 2024, we will accelerate the reduction of bureaucratic hurdles that residents face when accessing government services, simplify access, and shorten processing times. The State has prioritized areas where services touch an outside number of customers and constitute millions of transactions per year for New Yorkers. By streamlining interactions with these services, we will lessen the "time tax" on residents and create operational efficiencies for the State.

### *Streamline the Liquor Licensing and Application Processes*

Average processing time for license applications operating under a temporary retail permit, which allow the service of alcoholic beverages while licenses are pending, is approximately nine months, with a current backlog of approximately 6,000 applications. Until recently, the State Liquor Authority (SLA) granted 30-day extensions when requested by the applicant. This resulted in 3,000 to 4,000 applications for 30-day extensions submitted each month. By way of an SLA Advisory, the Authority now offers applicants the opportunity to request up to three 30-day extension periods, reducing the paperwork burden for applicants and drastically reducing the number of incoming applications, allowing SLA to focus on reducing the application backlog.

To address the backlog of pending applications, SLA is appointing a committee to review and process the approximate 6,000 application backlog within six months. In addition, there is no standardized process for the agency to review and approve an application that may require minimal review. To expedite the processing of minimally complex applications, SLA will implement a new review process that will better align agency action with the type of application requested. This process aims to shorten wait time significantly.

### *Simplify Process to Request Vital Records*

The current process of ordering vital records is manual and time-consuming, requiring individuals to fill out paper forms, mail them in, and wait for processing. The process can be inefficient and frustrating for both the public and the staff responsible. At the same time, the Bureau of Vital Records has a significant backlog in processing requests, which was exacerbated by the pandemic.

The Bureau of Vital Records will develop a secure and user-friendly web-based ordering system, which will streamline the process of ordering vital records, making it more



convenient and efficient for all involved. The system will allow individuals to submit requests online, pay for their records electronically, and track the status of their requests in real time. Moving to a web-based ordering system will yield many benefits, including improved service and convenience for the public, reduced processing times, greater accuracy, increased transparency, and reduced costs.

### **Establish Statewide Customer Experience Infrastructure**

An important step to advance the State’s new customer experience agenda is to establish a framework for supporting agencies in making improvements while communicating progress to the residents of New York. To establish this foundation, the State will implement a New York State Customer Data and Analytics Program to ensure that the “voice of the customer” is at the center of decision-making, and establish a New York State Design System to ensure that public-facing digital services are universally designed with accessibility and customer experience principles built in from the beginning.

#### *Develop Customer Data and Analytics Program*

Many private sector companies use analytics to pinpoint areas where website visitors are getting confused, or stuck in a loop, or where they are exiting a webpage without accomplishing their goal. This information is then used to study and fix issues that may otherwise not have been identified.

New York State, however, does not have a complete picture of how users are interacting with online government services and websites due to a lack of robust data and analytics. Data is not currently tracked or reported in a consistent way, and as a result, agencies lack the ability to understand pain points and are limited in their ability to identify ways to improve the customer experience.

Building on Governor Hochul’s commitment to improve customer experience, the “New York Experience” team within the Office of Information Technology Services and the Office

of General Services will develop data and analytics programs to help state agencies continue to improve the customer experience through its various communications channels. Following the lead of the federal government, this data will be built out in a public dashboard to share information with the public, build trust, and create transparency.

### *Establish a New York State Design System*

Residents increasingly prefer to interact with state agencies through their websites and mobile applications. According to a national survey, the top method by which people like to interact with state government services – preferred by more than half (55%) of respondents – is a website.<sup>3</sup> Given this preference, New York State websites and digital applications should be easily navigable by and accessible to all users. People should feel that they are in trusted locations that have similar functions and visual identifiers across all official State digital tools.

A design system is a documented catalog of components and styles used within a website or application, including details on how and why each should be implemented. A unified digital design system functions as the cornerstone of building and displaying trusted and consistent experiences, but New York State does not have such a unified system. Without one, IT vendors, state developers, and digital teams will continue to struggle to create consistent experiences across the state’s digital landscape. Studies have found that such systems increase team efficiency by as much as 47%, in part by reducing errors and freeing up engineers to focus on more complex problems.<sup>4</sup>

Governor Hochul is directing New York State to develop a centralized design system that will encompass all recognizable and reusable components including real functional code, documentation, user research and methodology, and use case examples. A dedicated team will build, test, and support the design system so that it can be used across the state. Centralizing the management of the State’s digital design package will allow for more

uniform accessibility support, consistency, and ease of use for New Yorkers that use the State's web and mobile applications.

### **Build a Stronger Public Sector Workforce**

The state workforce decreased by 10% between 2013 and 2023, leaving vacancies in thousands of positions responsible for providing critical services to New York State residents. Today, the state workforce has more than 10,000 vacancies.

Governor Hochul has already taken steps to address this crisis, including lifting the years-long state hiring freeze, eliminating application fees for state civil service exams, expanding opportunities via the Governor's Program to Hire Individuals with Disabilities (55/b), and providing funding for new testing centers and recruitment offices across the state.

These steps will lead to a stronger and modern public sector workforce, but will take time to bear fruit. To address the immediate hiring needs of state agencies and welcome thousands of qualified New Yorkers into rewarding public sector jobs, Governor Hochul will advance two initiatives to eliminate barriers to hiring in the civil service system.

#### *Hire More State Workers and Alleviate the Public Sector Staffing Crisis*

In 2023, the Department of Civil Service (DCS) launched the Hiring for Emergency Limited Placement (HELP) Program in an effort to address the statewide workforce shortage in critical health and safety titles across state government. Since then, more than 6,500 New Yorkers have been hired into healthcare and public safety positions through this program, helping to reduce the staffing shortages in these crucial roles.

Building on the success of the HELP program, Governor Hochul is directing DCS to pursue an expanded New York Hiring for Emergency Limited Placement Statewide (NY HELPS) program, so that agencies can fill vacancies open to the public on a permanent basis and better meet the needs of all New Yorkers. The expanded NY HELPS will enable New York

State agencies to fill critical vacancies more effectively, while DCS continues to implement efforts to improve and transform the civil service hiring process. DCS will also work with local government stakeholders to evaluate additional titles used by local governments for the NY HELPS program to alleviate staffing crises in our counties, cities, and towns.

*Remove Educational Barriers to Employment in State Government*

New York State continues to face recruitment challenges, and many positions require a college degree, which restricts the candidate pool and is a barrier for many people. Degree requirements for middle skill jobs, those that require employees with more than a high school diploma but less than a college degree, lock out the more than half of working-aged adults who do not hold a bachelor's degree.

Employers are resetting degree requirements for a wide range of roles, dropping the requirement for college degrees for entry-level, professional, and even some supervisory and managerial positions. This is not only a trend in the private sector- the federal government and some states, including New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, have removed degree requirements for thousands of jobs. These entities have realized that the knowledge, skills, and abilities gained from work and life experience can be as valuable as university diplomas in today's fast-changing environment. Decreasing degree requirements offers opportunities for a more diverse and inclusive workforce for many positions, which many non-degree holders are well-qualified to fill through experience.

Governor Hochul is directing DCS to review college degree requirements for hundreds of civil service titles and consider equivalent experience where it is sensible to do so. By combining experience-based hiring with degree-based hiring, the state will expand opportunities to many New Yorkers without diluting the quality of the candidate pool. Many employers that have made a college degree optional report that non-graduates with experience perform nearly as or equally well on key factors such as time to reach full productivity, time to promotion, and level of productivity. This change could affect nearly 1,000 titles across state government agencies.

## **SECTION 17: GROWING NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGRICULTURE**

Agriculture is a crucial contributor to the health of New York's economy, environment, and its communities. Governor Hochul has taken significant action to support our farmers and food industry, including:

- Making the 20% Investment Tax Credit refundable for five years to spur on-farm investments.
- Issuing an Executive Order directing New York State agencies to source 30% of their food purchases from New York producers.
- Providing \$50 million to support scratch cooking facilities that use fresh New York State farm products in meal preparation for K-12 school children, and more.

Governor Hochul recognizes that the challenges faced by the agricultural sector today are not siloed, but rather interwoven with other policy areas, such as health, the environment, education, and more. To truly promote and build a resilient food system, we must craft partnerships, programs and policies that break these barriers. Governor Hochul is therefore proposing a suite of cross-cutting initiatives that will strengthen the industry and promote a more resilient future for our agriculture, food, and forestry sectors.

### **Help Our Farmers**

#### *Bolster New York's Dairy Industry*

New York ranks as the fifth largest milk producing state in the nation, with dairy farming accounting for half of New York's agricultural economy. In recent years, several businesses have made important commitments to expand our dairy processing capacity. However, workforce challenges, more frequent and severe weather events, and global market conditions continue to impact farmers' ability to operate and sustainably produce milk.

Governor Hochul is committed to maintaining the momentum achieved in recent years and building upon existing efforts to attract and retain food manufacturers in New York, especially dairy processors.

Governor Hochul will provide expanded state investment for grants for on-farm milk storage technologies and processing infrastructure to mitigate transportation issues during periods of intense winter weather and road closures, which will improve dairy supply chain efficiency and avoid raw milk dumping related to emergency events.

The State is also committed to assisting its farmers to mitigate the impacts of climate change and reduce their carbon footprint, which is a critical component of both nutrient management and water quality goals. Governor Hochul will launch a new Alternative Waste Management and Enhanced Precision Feed Program that will further the mitigation of agricultural greenhouse gas emissions, provide opportunities to sequester carbon, and scale assistance to meet unmet farmer demands.

These investments, paired with existing programs and financial support, will help catapult New York to being among the very top dairy producing states in the country.

### *Create the Agricultural Workforce One-Stop Shop*

Our state's food and agricultural workforce is critical to producing abundant, safe, and healthy food for all New Yorkers. It is more important now than ever before that agricultural employers and employees alike feel supported as they navigate new regulations and a changing work landscape. Since the adoption of the Farm Labor Fair Labor Practices Act in 2019, there have been numerous questions from farmers, farmworkers, and union representatives about the new rules for workplace interactions on the farm. With the farm workforce largely bilingual, there is an additional challenge to communicate with the farming community quickly and effectively.

To best address these concerns, Governor Hochul is directing Cornell University's Agricultural Workforce Development Program to create and manage a full suite of tools,

including office hours to take questions, webinars for information exchange, a web page for submitting questions, a Frequently Asked Questions resource, hotline information, and more. This effort will be supported by the Department of Labor, the Public Employee Relations Board, and the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

*Promote a One Health Approach as Part of New York's Agrifood System*

One Health is an approach, recognized by the United States Department of Agriculture, designed to sustainably optimize the health of people, animals, and our ecosystems. A collaborative One Health approach can reduce threats to the human-animal-environment interface through activities like disease detection and prevention, food safety education, and veterinary care optimization.

To ensure New York remains on the forefront of controlling cross-sector public and animal health threats, Governor Hochul will introduce a diverse package of projects and programs, including a collaborative veterinary workforce program between Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine and SUNY campuses; increased engagement with the New York State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory Advisory Board; additional support for the New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health; adjustments to reimbursement and fee structures for existing on-farm animal health testing programs and the creation of a new animal health testing program; the establishment of a GroupGAP food safety certification training program; and the development of a community gardens land access toolkit.

*Increase Youth Agricultural Leadership and Education Opportunities*

Providing youth with education, leadership, and training opportunities in agriculture is vital to driving interest in future agricultural and food system careers. Building on the 2023 State of the State agriculture workforce initiative, Governor Hochul—in partnership with the Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences New York Agriculture

Education & Outreach Program—will stand up New York’s first-ever collaborative youth agriculture leadership conference to support further collaboration among youth agriculture organizations and identify programmatic opportunities for youth engagement with the agriculture and food sectors that reflects the industry’s future workforce needs.

To further build on the promotion of our county fairs, which serve as a foundation for agricultural education for young people, Governor Hochul will also launch the County Fair Passport Program. The Department of Agriculture and Markets will design, print, and distribute an agricultural fair passport booklet that will encourage attendance at the State’s county and youth fairs by allowing fairgoers to collect stamps at each fair they visit. Recognizing that transportation barriers can hinder fair attendance, Governor Hochul will also launch an initiative to support fairs in organizing trips for children.

## **Innovate in Agriculture**

### *Grow New York’s Bioeconomy*

Governor Hochul will set a progressive bioeconomy development agenda that will leverage existing opportunities to develop bioproduction within the agriculture and forestry sectors.

New York will advance the use of wood products and high-value mass timber design in state-funded construction and infrastructure projects and expand the use of mass timber in new construction across New York State with the upcoming Uniform Code update.

Governor Hochul will also provide capital funding to promote commercialization of biobased products, such as those produced with industrial hemp, and invest to further strengthen Cornell University’s Integrated Pest Management Program. These investments will create new market opportunities for New York products and protect the sustainable growth and management of biomass to be used for products and materials in the bioeconomy.

### *Launch New York’s Blue Food Transformation*



Governor Hochul will launch New York’s Blue Food Transformation initiative to bolster marine agriculture, promote a healthy natural environment, and provide New Yorkers with a nutritious source of locally grown seafood. Governor Hochul will provide crucial capital funding for farmers to invest in marine dock space, processing equipment, and other infrastructure that is vital for the growth of their businesses. She will also direct the Department of Agriculture and Markets, Department of Environmental Conservation, Empire State Development and other agencies involved in the production and marketing of seafood to evaluate and coordinate state policies and programs that impact aquaculture licensing, food safety, and economic development measures, and consider pathways for industry growth. This will include coordinating with Cornell Cooperative Extension to develop New York’s first ever exclusive seafood cuisine trail on Long Island.

## **SECTION 18:**

# **FIGHTING CYBERCRIME**

The safe and secure functioning of New York’s economy, critical infrastructure, and government services is dependent on the security of its digital infrastructure and information. Every day, New York’s cybersecurity is threatened by scammers, criminal enterprises, and foreign adversaries. These attacks range from nuisances that temporarily slow websites to the disruption of vital services such as hospitals. They also encompass crimes such as financial fraud and online sexual exploitation, which are now growing exponentially, fueled by the internet and social media.

In response to this acceleration of cybercrimes, Governor Hochul is raising the bar for defending vital critical infrastructure and protecting New Yorkers from harm online. In 2023, the Governor released New York’s first-ever statewide cybersecurity strategy, directing State agencies to ensure all New Yorkers are better protected from cyber threats. New York is now leading the nation in executing forward-leaning, innovative programs for reducing cybersecurity risk and improving statewide cyber resilience.

In 2024, Governor Hochul will accelerate and expand these programs to keep pace with rapidly evolving cyber threats.

### **Build Cyber Resilience**

#### *Grow the New York State Joint Security Operations Center*

Malicious cyber actors are increasingly targeting state and local governments, including in New York State. The cybersecurity vendor Sophos found that the share of U.S. state and local governments that reported being targeted by ransomware attacks increased from 58% to 69% between 2022 and 2023.<sup>110</sup> IBM found that the cost per breach increased

nationally by 15% in the last three years; the average cost to remediate is now \$4.5 million per breach.<sup>111</sup>

Today, many county and local governments lack the resources to obtain the defensive tools and services needed to protect themselves against current cyber threats and struggle to recruit and retain cybersecurity personnel. In response to these challenges and to further enable the exchange of information and collaboration, Governor Hochul launched the New York State Joint Security Operations Center (JSOC) in 2022 in partnership with the mayors of Albany, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, New York City, and Yonkers.

In 2024, the State University of New York (SUNY) will join the JSOC as a data sharing partner. As part of SUNY's enhancement of cybersecurity defenses, SUNY is deploying additional sophisticated cyber tools across an initial cohort of 25 campuses.

#### *Expand Cybersecurity Shared Services*

Governor Hochul is committed to reducing statewide cyber risks with efforts that include assessment programs provided by the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services to help organizations improve their cybersecurity posture, as well as cyber threat intelligence and support provided by the New York State Police for law enforcement investigations carried out statewide. The backbone of New York's statewide cyber defenses is its Shared Services Program, which offers county and local governments access to state-of-the-art tools and support at no additional cost.

The first service offered via the Shared Services Program is Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR). EDR tools detect suspicious behavior on computers. The EDR tool provided by the Shared Services Program has successfully stopped several potentially damaging cyberattacks and, to date, protects over 70,000 county and local government computers.

The Shared Services Program is designed to ensure that the State can compile data across individual incidents into a comprehensive statewide picture that benefits all New Yorkers.

As a result, the Shared Services Program has reduced the risk of cyberattacks not just to county and local governments, but also to State agencies. In 2024, Governor Hochul will expand the Shared Services Program by:

- Extending eligibility for the EDR shared service to include the two largest municipalities from each county outside of New York City.
- Adding an additional capability, Attack Surface Management (ASM), to the Shared Services Program as a complement to the EDR tool. ASM is a capability for discovering internet-facing computers and analyzing them to determine if any are currently in a vulnerable state that might be exploited by hackers.

Furthering Governor Hochul's vision for a more cyber resilient state, New York will leverage federal grant funds to offer the following additional cybersecurity tools and services to eligible local government entities: scholarships for information technology staff to obtain cybersecurity training and certifications; deployment support for multi-factor authentication on systems; and, online security awareness training.

## **Protect Vulnerable Populations from Cybercrime**

### *Safeguard Teens from Online Sexual Exploitation*

A 2022 Pew Research survey showed that 95% of teenagers are using social media and 46% of teenagers say they are on the internet almost constantly.<sup>112</sup> These high rates of internet use by teenagers, coupled with recent technology advancements such as artificial intelligence and the use of manipulated fake images and videos (known as “deepfakes”), mean that online harassment and internet-enabled crimes are increasingly impacting young people. The FBI has reported a troubling rise in a type of technology-facilitated abuse known as sextortion – in which a perpetrator threatens to distribute a victim’s private and sensitive material if not provided with images of a sexual nature, sexual favors, or money. Perpetrators of sextortion most commonly target minors because of the long

periods of time they spend online and because minors are susceptible to grooming and manipulation by adults.

Data collected by the FBI shows a 1,000% increase in incidents of financial sextortion reported in the first six months of 2022 as compared to the same timeframe in 2021. In December 2022, the FBI issued a national public safety alert on financial sextortion schemes, citing over 7,000 reports of online financial sextortion of minors, of which 3,000 victims were as young as eight years old and were primarily boys, and more than a dozen suicides.<sup>113</sup> FBI Director Christopher Wray noted that in particular, “the FBI has seen a horrific increase in the reports of financial sextortion schemes targeting minor boys.”<sup>114</sup>

One of the most impactful ways to prevent sextortion is teaching minors about online safety, the potential consequences of sharing explicit content, the signs of manipulative behavior, and red flags indicative of potential sextortion attempts.<sup>115,116,117</sup> In 2024, Governor Hochul will direct the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV) to develop sextortion-focused training and technical assistance programs as well as a public-facing informational website and to conduct a public awareness campaign. The training and technical assistance programs will assist both gender-based violence support organizations and law enforcement agencies seeking to support victims and investigate sextortion crimes. The public-facing website will provide educational materials for guardians and other audiences. The public awareness campaign will use social media platforms to publicize the warning signs of sextortion, technology-facilitated abuse, and deepfakes.

### *Combat Elder Financial Exploitation*

According to AARP, older Americans lose an estimated \$28.3 billion annually to elder financial exploitation. The FBI reported an 84% increase in the total losses by elderly victims of financial crime between 2021 and 2022, and monetary losses due to investment fraud reported by victims over 60 increased over 300% in the same time frame.<sup>118</sup> The true scale of the problem is likely greater; efforts to measure the volume of scams targeting

older New Yorkers are complicated by low rates of reporting because victims often feel ashamed.<sup>119</sup>

According to data from the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA), the contribution of New Yorkers aged 50 and older to the State's GDP is projected to grow from \$719 billion to \$2.2 trillion by 2050. The same population also contributes 39 percent of state and local taxes.<sup>120</sup> Given the criminals' financial motivation, the projected growth of financial wealth among older New Yorkers will further increase the impact to the public and New York's economy from this type of fraud and exploitation.

Financial crime can have devastating impacts on the security and well-being of older victims. Victims may experience poverty, reduced quality of life, and fewer options for care and housing. Beyond financial loss, victims are more likely to report negative emotional or behavioral impact such as shock, anger, self-blame, depressive symptoms, anxiety, and all-cause posttraumatic stress disorder.<sup>121</sup>

Governor Hochul will take a multi-pronged approach to combat elder financial exploitation by:

- Proposing legislation to authorize financial institutions to temporarily hold a transaction involving a vulnerable adult's account given reasonable suspicion of financial exploitation.
- Establishing the New York State Interagency Elder Justice Coordinating Council, bringing together State agencies to plan and review initiatives to combat elder abuse.
- Strengthening New York's Enhanced Multidisciplinary Teams to enable them to better address cases of elder abuse and exploitation.

## **SECTION 19: BUILDING OUR TRANSPORTATION FUTURE**

New York’s economic resilience relies on an equitable and efficient transportation system that can connect communities and drive a stronger economic future for the State. To help get New Yorkers to where they need to go – safely, swiftly, and sustainably – Governor Hochul has invested in a holistic statewide capital plan that prioritizes needed repairs to our roads and rails while also providing for unprecedented expansion in our transportation infrastructure. Over the last year, Governor Hochul has celebrated milestone achievements on major projects across the state:

- Completed phase two and progressed the third and final phase of the \$1.7 billion Hunts Point Access project to transform the South Bronx by reconstructing the interchange of the Bruckner and Sheridan Expressways and provide easier access to Hunts Point Terminal Market in the Bronx with enhanced bicycle and pedestrian safety.
- Broke ground on the transformational I-81 Viaduct Project, which will reconnect disadvantaged communities in the City of Syracuse severed by the construction of the interstate in the 1950s and 1960s, replacing the existing elevated structure with the new Business Loop 81 as well as an integrated Community Grid that will disperse traffic along local north-south and east-west streets.
- Broke ground in New York and New Jersey on the Gateway Hudson Tunnel Project, marking the beginning of a nationally important piece of infrastructure that will bring millions of visitors to New York every year.
- Signed a full funding grant agreement for the Second Avenue Subway Phase 2 project, enabling the start of the effort to bring the Q line north to East Harlem, with new ADA-accessible stations at 106<sup>th</sup> St., 116<sup>th</sup> St. and 125<sup>th</sup> St.
- Made significant progress on the construction of the Metro-North Penn Station Access project, which will create four new stations in the Bronx and bring rail service within one mile of 500,000 residents, including new interlocking

components, infrastructure, and catenary structures. The project will expand access to jobs, education and entertainment for East Bronx communities and substantially reduce travel times, provide reverse commuting opportunities, and offer a critical second route into Manhattan for the first time ever through Metro-North.

- Moved forward with transformational improvements at JFK Airport, including breaking ground on the \$4.2 billion, 1.2 million square foot Terminal 6 project. Construction is proceeding on the \$9.5 billion, 2.4 million square foot Terminal 1 project.
- Repaved more than 1,600 lane miles across New York State, including over 500 miles as part of the Pave Our Potholes program. Notable projects included portions of the Northern State Parkway on Long Island, State Route 5S in the Mohawk Valley and State Route 31 in the Finger Lakes.
- Kicked off design of the Penn Station Reconstruction project in partnership with local elected officials and railroad partners based on the Penn Station Master Plan, a joint planning process undertaken by the railroads. When complete, Penn Station will be transformed into a world-class commuter and intercity transit hub.
- Secured a major new investment in the Howland Hook Marine Terminal on Staten Island, projected in the range of \$200-300 million, bringing capacity enhancements, infrastructure improvements, sustainability upgrades, and 300 jobs to the facility.
- Released the draft design report and environmental assessment for the Kensington Expressway Project, which will reconnect the east-west neighborhoods and reestablish the green space originally provided by Humboldt Parkway by reconstructing the Kensington Expressway in a six-lane tunnel — without compromising the long-term capacity of this important regional transportation link.

Alongside major capital investments in our state's infrastructure, Governor Hochul has also worked to secure a sustainable financial future for our transportation system, including by taking actions to:



- Sign a historic budget agreement with a record investment to ensure the Metropolitan Transportation Authority’s long-term fiscal sustainability, leading to five straight years of projected balanced operating budgets.
- Complete the environmental review of the State’s nation-leading congestion pricing program with the MTA and local and federal partners. This significant milestone brings New York closer to a future with cleaner air, better public transit and less traffic clogging our streets.
- Sign an expansion of the New York City Automatic Bus Lane Enforcement (ABLE) program to speed up bus transit.

In the year ahead, Governor Hochul will continue to advance the transformative projects and policies necessary to keep New York on the move.

### **Invest in Infrastructure**

#### *Make it Possible to Extend the Second Avenue Subway West*

With Phase Two of the Second Avenue subway designed, funded, and poised for construction, the MTA will evaluate, scope and plan for its potential next destination: extending the Q line west along 125<sup>th</sup> Street with three new stops at Lenox Avenue, St. Nicholas Avenue and culminating at Broadway. Extending the line would create crucial uptown interconnectivity across the 1, 2, 3, A, B, C, and D lines, as well as dozens of high-ridership bus routes. Upon completion, the line could serve 240,000 daily customers, with upwards of 90% from equity communities.

An extended Second Avenue Subway – West line would pass through East Harlem, Central Harlem, and Manhattanville along the busy commercial corridor of 125<sup>th</sup> Street and would create a true east-west subway connection in Upper Manhattan. The east-west connectivity would benefit residents of adjacent neighborhoods and riders coming from upper

Manhattan and the Bronx. Service would provide a growing population of customers with accessibility to east side job centers, as well as improve connections between key employment, education, and cultural centers, such as Columbia University's Manhattanville campus.

The service would reduce congestion on bus routes along the heavily congested 125<sup>th</sup> Street, where more than 30,000 people ride the bus daily. Finally, the line would add opportunities for growth and development by the new subway stations. The westward expansion of the Second Avenue line was identified as a cost-effective initiative in MTA's 20 Year Needs Assessment comparative evaluation, which associated the project with very high ridership and significant travel time savings compared to other infrastructure investments.

Governor Hochul knows New York needs another crosstown rail connection, and we can't wait another decade to begin planning it. MTA will evaluate the feasibility of extending the Q line west and performing the initial tunneling work as a continuation of the Phase Two tunneling work. The feasibility study will determine alignment options, service requirements and impacts, and how work could be performed to reduce costs and save time. The MTA will also initiate environmental review and preliminary engineering necessary to commence tunneling following the feasibility study. By continuing the tunnel boring machine's westward path beyond the Phase Two work, the MTA may be able to incur substantial time and cost savings, estimated at over \$400 million, relative to performing that work at a later date.

### *Move the Interborough Express Forward*

The Interborough Express (IBX) represents one of the most impactful infrastructure projects initiated by Governor Hochul, with the potential to substantially cut down on travel times, reduce congestion, and link nearly 900,000 residents in Brooklyn and Queens to more than 17 transit connections. Since Governor Hochul directed the start of the

environmental review process for the IBX in January 2022, the MTA has substantially progressed the project by completing a planning study, selecting light rail as the transit mode, and advancing planning and engineering analysis. In November 2023, the MTA held three open houses to allow the public to learn more about the project and solicit community feedback.

With support from the Hochul administration, the MTA will now initiate formal design and engineering of the IBX, an essential step in allowing this project to proceed.

*Break Ground on New York's Largest Solar Carport*

At Governor Hochul's direction, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey will begin construction of New York State's largest customer-sited solar plus storage project: a solar carport canopy at JFK Airport, also the largest solar carport in New York State. The combined 12.3-MW solar energy installation will include 7.5 MW of battery storage which will help reduce airport energy use during peak periods. The project will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 6,000 metric tons annually and provide the benefits of clean power both to the airport and to nearby low-income neighborhoods in Queens. It will also enable the Port Authority to make critically important progress on its 2025 and 2030 decarbonization emissions goals.

*Connect Local Residents to Good Jobs on MTA Projects*

MTA's capital programs rely on and support an enormous labor workforce within the state. Recent federal guidance has opened the possibility of local hiring on public projects. This presents a significant opportunity. By encouraging local hiring, capital projects can stimulate economic growth within the very communities they are set to serve, injecting income and opportunities into areas that often struggle with limited resources.

A current MTA pilot program requires contractors on four construction contracts to commit to a goal of 20% hours worked by local residents living in zip codes surrounding the construction site or by workers living in lower income communities. Initial results on these projects – New Jamaica Bus Depot, Rockaway Line Resiliency & Rehabilitation, ADA package 4 station improvements, and Broadway Junction station revitalization – have demonstrated the tangible benefits of hiring local residents to help build up their communities. MTA will extend the pilot on additional contracts, including the Second Avenue Subway – Phase 2 project.

### *Launch “Infrastructure Hub” to Simplify Access to Funding Opportunities*

Governor Hochul’s bold infrastructure agenda is delivering transformative projects to New York communities. These major investments not only address critical infrastructure improvements but also promote equity and connectivity, combat climate change, and create well-paying jobs. The State’s investment in infrastructure is supported by federal funding available through President Biden’s Investing in America agenda, including the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS and Science Act.

Governor Hochul will launch the “Infrastructure Hub,” a new website showing the historic investments underway to improve our roads, bridges, tunnels, public transportation, water quality, clean energy systems, and broadband internet access. [Infrastructure.NY.gov](https://Infrastructure.NY.gov) features an interactive map highlighting key infrastructure projects underway that are funded by the State, as well as federal investments. The website also allows users to search technical assistance programs and currently open federal grant opportunities, and connects users to program resources and the latest infrastructure news.

### **Getting Around Safely and Equitably**

*Pass Sammy’s Law to Save Lives*

Motor vehicle related traffic injuries are the leading cause of injury related deaths and result in combined hospitalization and emergency costs of \$1.1 billion each year, according to the NYS Department of Health. Between 2019 and 2022, New York State experienced a 24% increase in fatal motor vehicle crashes and roadway fatalities, according to data from SUNY Albany's Institute for Traffic Safety Management and Research.

Governor Hochul is committed to making New York the safest state in the country for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers alike. That's why, in 2023, she launched an automated work zone speed monitoring pilot program, signed legislation to enable local governments to install cameras at key intersections to enforce traffic light and school zones speeding violations, introduced regulatory changes to increase penalties for habitually dangerous drivers and measures to remove them from New York roadways, and improved the Move Over Law to protect drivers across the state. But our work is not done.

In 2023, Governor Hochul called for allowing New York City to lower its speed limit to 20 miles per hour. This year the Governor will again seek passage of the legislation known as "Sammy's Law." Slower speeds save lives, and if the City of New York determines that a lower speed limit is in its best interest to protect people, the State should not be an obstacle.

#### *Improve Enforcement of Toll Violators and Implement a Balanced Approach to Fare Evasion*

A functional and financially sustainable transportation infrastructure is dependent on customers paying their tolls and fares. Since the conversion to open-road tolling in 2017, uncollectable tolls due to intentional obstruction or defacement of license plates has skyrocketed, with now more than 5% of license plates going unread and uncharged by tolls every day. The MTA's Blue-Ribbon Panel on Fare and Toll Evasion estimated that the MTA is losing more than \$700 million to fare and toll evasion, a sum which does not factor lost revenue to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, Thruway Authority, or local governments.

To help ensure everyone is playing by the same rules and that our systems get the funding they need, New York's tolling and transit agencies are seeking to combat fare and toll evasion with measures ranging from enhanced crackdown efforts on bridge and tunnel scofflaws to the procurement of next-generation fare gates in the subway.

To further combat fare and toll evasion, Governor Hochul will propose a package of common-sense measures to ensure that riders and drivers pay their fair share and enforcement is deployed in a consistent and equitable manner. The package will increase monetary fines for purposeful license plate defacement and obscuration, ban the sale of "vanish plates" that are designed to thwart toll readers, allow police to seize license plate covers, designate intentional toll evasion as a theft-of-services misdemeanor, and other measures.

Governor Hochul will also propose that the MTA be given the same power to enforce fare evasion on the commuter railroads that it currently has on the New York City Transit system. To ensure fair and more equitable enforcement, police would have discretion to issue a written warning, rather than a summons, for first-time offenders. First-time offenders would also be eligible for fine forgiveness if they enroll in NYC's Fair Fares program.

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