

EMPIRE STATE RISING





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A Blueprint for Immigrant Progress and Justice

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Introduction

The **New York Immigration Coalition** (NYIC) is an umbrella policy, advocacy, and coordinating service organization that represents over 200 immigrant and refugee rights groups throughout New York.

One of the nation's largest and most influential immigrant rights organizations, the NYIC is at the forefront of serving one of the most diverse and dynamic newcomer populations in the United States. The NYIC's multi-racial, multi-sector membership spans movements and includes grassroots and nonprofit organizations, religious and health institutions, labor unions, and justice-focused groups. The NYIC is more than a coalition—it is a force for systemic change.

Founded in 1987, the NYIC is not just a space for immigrant groups to voice their concerns; it is a powerhouse driving collective action that delivers tangible, material change for the most vulnerable and marginalized communities. We do this work by spearheading innovative policies, promoting and protecting the rights of immigrant communities, improving newcomer access to services, developing leadership and capacity, expanding civic participation, and mobilizing member groups to respond to the fluctuating needs of immigrant communities.

Through bold, coordinated efforts, the NYIC is shaping a future where every immigrant has the power, opportunity, and justice they deserve—transforming New York into a national model of **immigrant-driven progress**.



OUR VALUES

Inclusive & Representative Fair & Just Accountable & Trusted



OUR VISION

The NYIC envisions a New York State that is stronger because all people are welcome, treated fairly, and given the chance to pursue their dreams.



OUR MISSION

The NYIC, a state-wide member-led coalition of immigrant and refugee organizations, works to transform the lives of all New Yorkers by strengthening and building our members' power, organizing and educating our communities and the public, and using our collective voice to advocate for opportunity and justice.

Empire State Rising: A Blueprint for Immigrant Progress and Justice is an ambitious ten-year vision to empower immigrant New Yorkers by enhancing access to rights and opportunity throughout the state. Building on the NYIC's legacy of leading and winning very successful campaigns-from expanding access to driver's licenses, Medicaid, legal services, and translation and interpretation services, to securing rights for farmworkers and removing the racist citizenship question from the 2020 census-this Blueprint demonstrates our steadfast commitment to advocating for and reimagining immigrant rights and justice.1 Empire State Rising presents a strategic plan that tackles the unique challenges facing our vibrant and diverse populations by delivering bold, community-centered solutions at the state level. Rooted in cross-sector collaboration and collective action among immigrant rights and allied groups, we created a Blueprint that builds powerful alliances across the state and strives to ignite a movement to reshape the very fabric of New York, making way for a new era of justice and opportunity for all.

Our ten-year vision reflects extensive consultation and meaningful engagement with our members and partners from every region of New York State over the past year. Immigrant-led and immigrant-serving community-based organizations (CBOs) have a unique ability to identify barriers and practical solutions that empower immigrant communities to thrive. These organizations bridge gaps in federal, state, and local policies; deliver

innovative solutions rooted in their deep understanding of local issues and cultural dynamics; and are vital champions for their communities.

Spanning surveys, in-person events across the state, briefings, group and one-on-one sessions, our engagement documented the invaluable work and knowledge of grassroots and immigrant-led CBOs, policy and advocacy groups, as well as faith and labor organizations. Together, they shared the real challenges our communities face, their bold aspirations for the future, and the concrete steps we must take to transform New York.

The collective vision outlined in this Blueprint is not simply about opportunity for all—it is about **forging a better, more just path**, one that stands in stark contrast to the divisive, anti-immigrant rhetoric rising across the state and country.² Immigrants are too often subjected to misconceptions driven by fear and misinformation. Yet, they are the key to addressing our state's population decline, labor shortages, and community growth.³

Our vision rejects fear-mongering and recognizes the undeniable truth: immigrants are the backbone of New York and will power it into the future. Together, we're building a state where every individual, no matter where they come from, has the chance to thrive and contribute to vibrant and prosperous communities. This is our moment to lead with courage and conviction and to show that New York stands for inclusivity, opportunity, and progress.

"Our vision rejects fear-mongering and recognizes the undeniable truth: immigrants are the backbone of New York and will power it into the future."

empire State Rising presents
our vision of shared
prosperity for all New Yorkers
and outlines a clear path for
progress in how we welcome
newcomers, advance climate
justice, and address critical
policy priorities across five
areas essential to immigrant
communities:

Ending State Support for Deportation & Detention Building Political Power Quality Education Economic Justice Healthy Communities

Together, we will shape a New York that stands as a national leader in opportunity, justice, equality, and resilience. By ensuring our state remains accessible, affordable, and welcoming to all—whether families, entrepreneurs, or students—we will create a future where everyone, regardless of background, has the chance to thrive.

We envision a state that empowers all New Yorkers with equal rights and protections, allowing them to participate freely and fairly in their communities. This state makes lifelong investments in its communities and provides access to quality education in early childhood through adulthood, strong job protections, essential supports for families to thrive, stable housing, and health care for a lifetime. We will rise to meet the challenge of climate change, building a just and sustainable future for all communities.

Empire State Rising outlines, for the coming decade, key cross-cutting and inclusive legislative policies, implementation changes, funding, and infrastructure investments that uplift immigrants, build coalition and community, and transform vision into action.

This Blueprint provides specific legislative, budgetary, and implementation solutions requiring bold action, a long-term vision, intentional advocacy, and a collective commitment to transforming our state into a place of true opportunity for all. Together, we will uplift immigrant communities and create a more dynamic, united future for everyone. New York can do it and lead the way for the nation.

Murad Awawdeh President and CEO



Key Stats for New York

Approximately

22.8% of New York's population,

or nearly 4.5 million individuals, is foreign-born. 4.5

Approximately

650,000

undocumented immigrants reside in New York.6

Top Countries of Origin for Immigrants in New York

Dominican
Republic 11.3%
China 9.5%
Jamaica 5.1%
Mexico 4.9%
Ecuador 4.1%.

Around 276,000 children in New York grow up

in households with at least one undocumented family member. 8

Since the spring of 2022, over

210,000

migrants have arrived in New York City

primarily from Latin America and the Caribbean, with notable numbers also coming from Africa and China. 9

Welcoming Newcomers

A global hub for many industries and a vibrant cultural center, New York remains a leading destination for those seeking new opportunities, greater political freedom, economic opportunity, safety, and the chance to build a better life with dignity and security. In the coming decade, our state has a unique opportunity to strengthen its future by creating a **vibrant**, **inclusive welcoming infrastructure** that supports both immigrants and receiving communities, fostering shared prosperity, expanded economic opportunities, and access to essential services for all.

New York urgently needs to transition from reactive and piecemeal welcoming efforts to a comprehensive, strategic approach that better meets the needs of immigrants and the communities they enrich. The current ad hoc, emergency response has failed to provide the necessary support and services for everyday New Yorkers and negatively impacts our communities. This lack of foresight and planning has not only strained our communities but has also left sensitive personal data more vulnerable due to insufficient safeguards.

New Yorkers deserve sustainable, community-informed intrastate welcoming infrastructure. Proactive planning will ensure our local communities are equipped to embrace their new neighbors without creating undue stress on local services or social tensions among long-standing and newer community members. Intentional, strategic action will reduce wasteful emergency spending while harnessing newcomers' diverse skills to foster growth and innovation.¹²

"Emergency contracting brings greater risk of waste and fraud, as agencies scramble to procure goods and services with less time and competition."

Testimony from NYC Comptroller Brad Lander¹⁰

"It's long past time for the City to move out of its emergency response mode and into a long-term approach that actually gets people on their feet... It is drastically cheaper..."

NYIC President & CEO Murad Awawdeh 11

Initiatives like Welcoming NY represent key efforts to support immigrant integration and community resilience.¹³ These programs not only facilitate short-term support and access to services but can also promote integration into local communities by connecting newcomers with local CBOs, community leaders, and schools.¹⁴ While CBOs have begun significant investments in these initiatives with support from philanthropy and targeted state government resources, increased government support is essential to strengthen local infrastructure and address the needs of both newcomers and long-term residents.

New York can continue to be a beacon for those seeking a better life by fostering a vibrant and inclusive environment. This is key to enriching our neighborhoods, mitigating the challenges of population decline, and maintaining our competitive edge. Building on this success, New York can become a national model for coordinated support systems, fully harnessing the benefits of immigration.



Vision for Progress

As New York evolves its approach to welcoming newcomers, the following guiding priorities should shape the way forward:

LONG-TERM WELCOMING INFRASTRUCTURE

Develop an intentional, adaptive, and long-term infrastructure that coordinates access to employment, education, health care, legal services, and other key areas to ensure that all immigrants—both newcomers and historic immigrant communities—have access to opportunity. This infrastructure will enable the state to move past costly emergency responses and instead welcome and integrate newcomers through informed, efficient, and effective strategies.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION

Grow a network of local, regional, and state-level entities—separate from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)—that fosters collaboration and resource-sharing among government agencies, CBOs, and other key stakeholders. Working together across all levels of government, this network can expand immigrant rights, ensure greater access to services and benefits, and identify innovative solutions—such as greater access to education, employment visas or work authorization—that improve immigrant outcomes and expand opportunity for all. This collaborative infrastructure will also position New York to lead the national conversation on creating humane, sustainable immigration policies that reflect the state's unique needs.

IMMIGRANT SUCCESS - NOT JUST SURVIVAL

Ensure the welcoming infrastructure supports true inclusion, going beyond short-term needs to ensure long-term success. This system must be flexible enough to direct funding where it's needed most—housing, health care, education, job training, civic engagement, and legal services—while strengthening communities across New York for everyone.

Climate Justice

The world's climate is changing, and the impacts are increasingly leading people to leave their homes.¹⁷ In their search for safety and opportunity, migrants—from abroad and within the United States—face climate-related challenges both on their journeys here and upon arriving in our state.¹⁸

Climate change is an existential threat to all New Yorkers, but especially immigrant communities. The change in Earth's climate has already begun to foundationally reshape life, affecting which crops we grow and what jobs we have to hotter summers, fiercer hurricanes, expansion of flood plains, flooding, and degraded air quality. These effects are most severe in under-resourced communities, where marginalized populations, including immigrants, 19 already face significant vulnerabilities 20 and have long endured environmental injustices due to systemic racism and inequality. 21

Immigrants, along with Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC), are also disproportionately affected by environmental and climate injustice due to geographic vulnerability and lack of access to resources. Geographic proximity (e.g. residing in floodplains or basement apartments),²² work setting, and inadequate access to language-appropriate communications,²³ health care, supportive assistance, and government planning mean that these communities are on climate change's front line without adequate support.²⁴ They often bear the brunt of extreme

"Low-income populations in New York State, notably those who are Indigenous, people of color, immigrants, unhoused, or live in rural areas, are more vulnerable due to existing forms of disadvantage and marginalization." 16

heat, intensified natural disasters, and negative health outcomes, and are frequently excluded from life-saving information and services due to language barriers.²⁵

Climate justice and inclusion are essential for building a more resilient and welcoming New York. A climate-resilient state is one that protects everyone-regardless of immigration status-by ensuring safe, affordable housing, access to good jobs, and equitable resilience and adaptation strategies that uplift all. This requires proactive health protections, support for displaced workers, and equitable disaster relief shaped by community input and local leadership. Centering equity in climate adaptation and resilience building is crucial to ensure that responses to climate change are inclusive and sustainable at the local level. By creating inclusive policies and labor protections, we can build a New York that turns climate challenges into opportunities for a more just, healthy, and resilient future for everyone.

"New York's climate is changing.
Temperatures are rising,
precipitation is increasing, sea
levels are rising, and extreme
weather events are becoming
more frequent and severe.
Over time, these changes are
projected to worsen." 15



Vision for Progress

New York State must address the heightened vulnerability of disadvantaged communities who face compounded environmental, socioeconomic, and historical burdens of racial and ethnic discrimination by the following guiding principles:

CLIMATE EQUITY AND JUSTICE

Continue to center, and advance, climate equity and justice in New York's adaptation and resilience strategies. Champion human rights by supporting all communities and equitably distributing those supports—from disaster recovery aid to housing to air conditioning—without regard to immigration status, ethnicity, or economic status. New York should emphasize safeguarding impacted communities—from worker protections to mitigating climate gentrification—while simultaneously addressing economic inequality.

INCLUSIVE CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND ADAPTABILITY

Prioritize the voices and leadership of BIPOC and marginalized communities, address historical harms and systemic racism while promoting equitable and sustainable climate solutions for the future. Uplift the knowledge, strengths, and needs within immigrant communities in climate resilience efforts. Foster community-led efforts, to ensure that initiatives are shaped by those directly affected and designed to leverage their skills while addressing their challenges. Valuing immigrant insights and contributions will help develop culturally and linguistically competent solutions that protect all communities—especially the most vulnerable—from climate-related impacts on housing, jobs, health, food, and education.

CLIMATE-RESILIENT HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Ensure that immigrants have spaces to live, work, and learn that are protected from the growing threats of climate change through climate-resilient homes and communities. This includes access to disaster-related information in a language they understand, safe housing, and affordable, culturally responsive health care that addresses climate-related issues like heat exposure and mental health challenges. Safeguard communities by monitoring for proper implementation of protections.

A STRONG AND ACCESSIBLE GREEN ECONOMY THAT LEADS TO A JUST TRANSITION

Prioritize creating good jobs in emerging sectors while ensuring a worker-centered transition and justice frame that advances economic and health justice. The state can mitigate climate impacts and seize growth opportunities by investing in reskilling and training and including underrepresented groups in the green economy. Protecting workers' rights to a hazard-free workplace should be central and include enforcement of strong safety measures and ongoing adaptation to evolving environmental challenges.



Ending State Support for Deportation, Detention & Mass Incarceration

Vision

We envision a radical reimagining of justice—one that dismantles punitive systems and centers on human dignity. By shifting from punishment to community-driven solutions we aim to end systemic violence against marginalized communities and rebuild trust between immigrant populations and state agencies, ensuring safety and privacy for all. Our vision prioritizes restorative justice, focusing on healing, empowerment, and collective accountability rather than retribution. It's time for New York to reject harmful practices and champion humane policing that protects, not harms, our communities. Achieving this transformative vision requires bold investments in services, infrastructure, and policies that prioritize the well-being of families and individuals. We are not just reforming the system—we are creating a new blueprint for justice that serves all people with compassion and equity, making New York a leader in the fight for justice and liberation.

There are currently around

330,000 CASES PENDING

in immigration courts in New York State and less than half of those people have lawyers to represent them.²⁶

Providing access to attorneys for all immigrants in New York State facing deportation proceedings could allow an additional 53,000 New Yorkers to remain in their communities, resulting in an estimated net benefit of

\$8.4 BILLION

for federal, state, and local governments over 30 years.²⁷

Legal representation matters

 from 2019 to present, people facing charges in immigration court in the state of New York with legal representation are

61% MORE LIKELY

to be allowed to stay in the country compared to those without legal representation.²⁸

Political, Social, and Economic Context

New York has made impressive strides in keeping its families together and promoting justice. Legal services funding has more than tripled as of 2024, and select localities have taken steps to prevent ICE from destabilizing their communities. However, more work remains to be done to build needed infrastructure and systems that prioritize human rights, dignity, and community well-being.

New York has an opportunity to create stronger communities and counter anti-immigrant narratives by enacting enforceable statewide policies to prioritize public safety by preventing collusion with ICE.²⁹ Immigrant communities deserve access to services and protections without the threat of detention and deportation—any collaboration between New York agencies and ICE erodes trust, puts immigrants at risk, and undermines these essential efforts.³⁰

"A lack of guaranteed legal representation, paired with systemic flaws in removal proceedings, increases the likelihood of unjust outcomes."

The expansion of deportation facilities leads to more arrests and, in turn, more deportations, causing devastating family separations and significant emotional and economic harm. The process leading up to deportation is also devastating for immigrant New Yorkers as thousands of immigrants and newcomers are denied due process. A lack of **guaranteed legal representation**, paired with systemic flaws in removal proceedings, increases the likelihood of unjust outcomes.31 Detention conditions are often overcrowded and substandard, with inadequate health care, abuse, and limited access to legal counsel.32 Immigrants exiting detention—like those exiting the criminal justice system-benefit from reintegration assistance, but lack of funding limits the services CBOs can provide.

The police-to-deportation pipeline costs New York millions of dollars in direct costs and lost economic potential.³³ While the state cannot stop ICE from operating within its jurisdiction, it can block state and local funds from supporting ICE

activities. Instead, those resources should be redirected to ensure immigrant residents have a fair chance in deportation proceedings and to prevent others from entering the system. This approach could allow **53,000 New Yorkers** to remain in their communities, generating an estimated **net benefit of \$8.4 billion**.³⁴

New York's immigration and criminal legal systems are intertwined. As the state works to address injustices in one, it must also consider the impact on community well-being in the other. Immigrants facing criminal charges may face severe immigration penalties—including detention, deportation, and ineligibility for U.S. citizenship. Public defenders often lack awareness of these immigration consequences. Advocates have been combating deportation and mass incarceration of immigrants and communities of color by protecting against deportation and advocating for reduced prison sentences through initiatives like the Clemency Justice campaign.³⁵





Policy Priorities

PASS AND ENFORCE PROVISIONS THAT PREVENT COLLUSION BETWEEN THE STATE AND ICE

Pass legislation prohibiting the use of state and local resources—such as police, hospital, and shelter staff—to enforce federal immigration laws³⁶ and ensure that these protections are enforceable so that immigrants can fully participate in society without fear.

END AND PROHIBIT CONTRACTS BETWEEN LOCALITIES AND ICE

Pass legislation to end and prohibit contracts between localities and ICE to eliminate the state's involvement in immigration detention, close Orange County Jail, and prevent ICE from subcontracting with local jails. Establish a \$2 million annual fund to empower the Attorney General to investigate local facilities that contract with ICE and pursue litigation against any violations of immigrant rights, ensuring accountability and protecting those impacted by immigration detention practices.

INVEST IN COMMUNITY ACCOMPANIMENT AND POST-RELEASE SERVICES

Invest at least \$3 million in community accompaniment and post-release support services for individuals leaving the immigration detention system. This funding must be allocated to regional CBOs to facilitate holistic integration.

BUILD DURABLE, STATE-WIDE LEGAL SERVICES ACCESS

Establish a strong, statewide legal services system for immigrant New Yorkers, offering affirmative relief and wraparound services. Invest to meet growing demand, ensure funding follows individuals transferred out of state, and prioritize legal staffing and training infrastructure so delivery of services is sustainable.

SUPPORT A FAMILY AND LOVED ONES FUND

Establish a \$2 million fund, adjusted annually for detention trends, to support individuals and families of those detained by assisting with bond payments and providing travel stipends for visits to loved ones, both in and out of state.

INCREASE QUALITY OF REPRESENTATION OF IMMIGRANTS BY PUBLIC DEFENDERS

The state must enhance support for immigration specialists within defender offices in order to promote a more just legal system for immigrant communities in New York.



Building Political Power & Guaranteed Civil Rights

Vision

We envision a **bold, inclusive democracy** in New York that empowers immigrant individuals and families to participate fully in democratic processes, ensuring civil rights are upheld and every voice, especially from historically marginalized communities, is heard. By removing language barriers and promoting culturally responsive civic education, we can ensure that all immigrants understand and can exercise their voting rights and responsibilities. Creating a safe and inclusive environment for engagement through processes like the census will lead to better representation and equitable resources for all. Empowering immigrant communities to become community leaders with a voice in state governance is key, and a continuing commitment to small-donor public financing can amplify the voices of people of color and women by reducing the influence of big money and large donors. This vision prioritizes true representation—where immigrants, people of color, and women are not only participants but leaders in shaping a just and representative democracy.

There are more than

800 LANGUAGES

spoken in New York and 2.5 million New Yorkers have Limited English Proficiency.³⁷

People who speak languages other than English,

undocumented populations, and racial and ethnic minorities are among the groups identified by the U.S. Census Bureau as "hard to count" even without a citizenship question.³⁸

In 2021, New York City elected its most demographically representative city government in history,

thanks in part to public financing.

Women more than doubled their representation from 27% to 61%.

And people of color increased their representation from 51% to 67%. 39

Political, Social, and Economic Context

New York's political landscape has been reshaped by progressive leadership, key legislative changes, and transformative ballot measures, such as ranked-choice voting and passage of Our City, Our Vote (Local Law 11-2021), which sought to expand voting rights to NYC residents with green cards or work authorization in municipal elections.⁴⁰

Language justice is essential for an inclusive democracy. The right to vote is often hailed as the "crown jewel" of American freedoms, serving as the foundation for all other rights.⁴¹ However, for Americans who are not proficient in English, this fundamental right can feel out of reach. Historically, language-based barriers to voting, like literacy tests and English-only ballots, have disenfranchised marginalized communities, isolated immigrant communities, restricted access to essential services, and reduced civic participation-including voting.42 While federal and state reforms like the John Lewis Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, and the New York Voting Rights Act (NYVRA), have sought to protect limited English-proficiency voters and voters of color, discrimination persists.43 Mandates under both VRA and NYVRA have resulted in a patchwork of language assistance services at poll sites and inconsistent availability of translated voter/election information, leaving many still unable to fully participate in elections.

Existing state and city language access requirements are inconsistent and exclude county-run agencies and their public programs. This results in uneven access to essential services and inadequate translation and interpretation services for many residents. While local governments have the authority to create their own language access policies tailored to their communities, a comprehensive state policy would establish clear, uniform standards for all levels of government.

Such a policy, alongside increased funding and community engagement in designing reforms, can ensure that public services and resources are utilized efficiently and that all residents, regardless of their preferred language, can build a successful life.

Moreover, a critical need exists for New York to establish **comprehensive language access infrastructure** to address the shortage of medical and legal interpreters and limited availability of translation services for languages of limited diffusion such as Portuguese, Pulaar, and Farsi. This would also create meaningful, sustainable job opportunities for local residents by training native speakers as community interpreters.

Civic engagement and the right to vote are essential for achieving equitable representation and prioritizing the needs of marginalized and vulnerable communities in the legislative process, especially as New York's immigrant population grows.⁴⁵ For immigrant communities, the democratic process is not just a right but a powerful tool to build influence and drive change. When immigrants vote, they help elect leaders who understand their unique challenges and shape policy solutions to address their needs.⁴⁶

To strengthen this participation, we must **invest in civic education** that equips immigrants with the knowledge and skills to engage fully in the political system. Raising public awareness of voting

"Civic engagement and the right to vote are essential for achieving equitable representation and prioritizing the needs of marginalized and vulnerable communities in the legislative process, especially as New York's immigrant population grows."

rights and responsibilities and building connections with local organizations strengthens communities and fosters a sense of belonging.

The census is vital for accurately representing New York's diverse communities. Leading up to the 2020 census, about one-quarter of people expressed concerns about the confidentiality of their responses and feared their data would be shared with other government agencies.⁴⁷ Many immigrant families, already in vulnerable positions, were particularly affected by the federal government's planned inclusion of a citizenship question in the 2020 census, which caused a sharp decline in intended participation,⁴⁸ especially among foreign-born and Spanish-speaking individuals.⁴⁹

Trusted community sources are essential for ensuring full participation in the census, which is crucial for an accurate count and securing appropriate federal funding for vital programs. Moreover, the census is crucial for determining New York's federal representation; in 2020, the state lost a Congressional seat and an electoral vote—an outcome that could have been avoided with just 89 more responses. These shifts significantly shape the legislature's composition and influence the legislation, policies, and funding that affect all communities, especially in high-population areas.

Money plays a disproportionate role in New York politics, with special interest groups and lobbying firms investing millions to influence elections and legislation, giving wealthy donors disproportionate control.51 This has created an uneven playing field where people of color and women aspiring to run for office often lack the financial resources to compete. While New York has implemented public financing systems for candidates who raise competitive funds from small donors,52 this system is undermined by wealthy donors exploiting loopholes and its limited enforcement capacity.53 Addressing these gaps is crucial to ensuring elected officials respond to constituents' concerns and that the political environment reflects New Yorkers' diverse needs.



Policy Priorities

EXPAND LANGUAGE ACCESS

Pass legislation to ensure that all state agencies and departments are covered by New York's language access policy and extend the mandate for interpretation and translation services to county-run agencies and departments to create a comprehensive statewide language access policy.

BUILD A SUSTAINABLE BILINGUAL STATE WORKFORCE

Develop regional language services cooperatives to recruit, train, and retain bilingual community members as interpreters in order to ensure a sustainable bilingual workforce for health care, education, and legal systems.

STRENGTHEN VOTING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Amend the NYVRA to expand language access at polls and remove population thresholds for Limited English Proficiency. Create programs for immigrants to work as poll monitors and interpreters, enhancing civic participation and language support.

PRIORITIZE CENSUS EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Recruit and train community leaders as census ambassadors, and establish information centers in public spaces to assist residents with census participation, citizenship applications, and voter registration, to ensure fair representation and equitable resource allocation for immigrant and BIPOC communities.

ENSURE EQUITABLE DATA DISAGGREGATION AND REPRESENTATION

Pass legislation that calls for the collection and disaggregation of data on immigrant communities, particularly for individuals of African and/ or Caribbean descent, and ensure the efficient implementation of a data category for Middle Eastern and North African populations.

LIMIT BIG MONEY IN POLITICS

Establish baseline funding for the state's public campaign finance program and launch public awareness initiatives to empower grassroots candidates to run for office, ultimately boosting political representation for marginalized communities.



Quality Education

Vision

We envision a high-quality public school system that is equitable and accessible for all of New York's children and families, irrespective of their background, home language, or ability. A state that sees all its children as our future adequately funds its schools and ensures immigrant students* have access to highly qualified teachers capable of guiding content mastery and developing English language skills. To fuel student achievement and foster strong school-family partnerships, we seek schools with diverse educators, responsive curricula, and engagement practices that reflect and embrace students' home cultures. Our vision is of a public school system that nurtures the whole child, providing wraparound services and supports that bolster students' well-being, success beyond graduation, and integration into their communities.

^{*}When we refer to immigrant students we are referring to both foreign born and children of immigrants, those who have lived here for years and those who are newly arrived. We are primarily referring to students who are learning English in school, who are formally called English Language Learners (ELLs) or Multilingual Learners in New York State.

In 2023-24, New York's public schools were home to

259,829

English Language Learners (ELLs).⁵⁴

One in Three Children

in New York State has at least one immigrant parent.⁵⁵

In 2023, the graduation rate for ELLs was

ONLY 57%

while the graduation rate for non-ELLs was 89%.56

A report by the Independent Budget Office revealed that

ONLY HALF

of the New York City schools enrolling newcomers had a **bilingual educator**, with bilingual education being a **top shortage area** and often led by uncertified teachers.⁵⁷

Political, Social, and Economic Context

New York has made strides in supporting immigrant students in recent years by increasing Foundation Aid funding (which is need-based), guiding districts in understanding their legal obligations to immigrant students, and promoting multilingualism through the expansion of the Seal of Biliteracy.⁵⁸

Immigrant students have enormous potential and deserve the investment that will allow them to thrive. When provided quality instruction and support, immigrant students excel and positively contribute to the overall academic achievement and the learning environment of their fellow students⁵⁹—reflecting the resilience, capabilities, and the strong commitment immigrant families have to education.⁶⁰ Additionally, newcomer immigrant students help sustain school funding and resources, filling critical gaps that arise when populations decline, while introducing their peers to diverse cultures and languages.⁶¹

However, immigrant students face numerous obstacles throughout their education, from enrollment to graduation. Persistent language and cultural barriers, along with a lack of trained staff at enrollment sites, often hinder their access to education. Moreover, misconceptions that older immigrant youth-particularly newcomers-are better suited for adult education programs rather than high school, limit their right to attend a full day of school between the ages of 15 and 21. Additionally, immigrant families often lack access to computers and have limited internet access and digital skills, which can complicate, or completely stymie, online enrollment, instruction, classroom support, and educational assessments.62 Late-arriving students (such as 16-21 year-olds) may need more than four years to graduate. Unfortunately, schools can be penalized for accommodating these students, leaving them at risk of "aging out" before completing their education.63

"When provided quality instruction and support, immigrant students excel and positively contribute to the overall academic achievement and the learning environment of their fellow students..."

Foundational investments in our state's schools are necessary to create environments more conducive to immigrant students' success. The diversity of student populations, local expertise, and political support has led to significant discrepancies in how well school staff are prepared to teach and support immigrant students and families. While best-practice programs to build competence exist, they are precariously funded and have been deployed on a small scale, so more must be done to elevate and replicate them.⁶⁴

In addition, addressing the pressing shortage of bilingual educators through certification and retention initiatives will expand access to bilingual programs, which offer academic, cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional advantages that improve educational outcomes for immigrant students. Moreover, recruiting educators from diverse backgrounds boosts educational attainment in students. Having immigrant students learn from immigrant teachers, and Black students from Black teachers, makes a difference in how students are treated, provides vital role models, and fosters a more inclusive school community.

New York must do more to embrace the critical role that our public schools play in the day-to-day lives of families and students by fully investing in wrap-around supports—from arts and culture initiatives to service referrals—found in best-practice programs. Inadequately funding well-being services, social workers, and extracurricular programming can jeopardize students who have experienced multiple, major forms of trauma. Immigrant students also benefit greatly from trained and culturally sensitive school and college counselors who help them navigate the complexities of the college application process.

Holistic support for students includes supporting their families too. Many districts fail to meet their legal obligations regarding language access, resulting in long wait times, inappropriate interpreters, poor-quality translations, and diminished access to vital information. Effective family engagement practices go beyond language access to empower immigrant parents to support their children's education and connect them with essential services, such as mental health programs for parents and legal assistance.

To effectively serve hyper-vulnerable students, New York must allocate targeted resources and attention. Students in temporary housing or shelters face extensive challenges as they are shuffled throughout the system. A lack of access to appropriate transportation, despite their right to remain in the school where they've been enrolled under the federal McKinney-Vento Act, compounds the difficulty of safeguarding their education and maintaining their connection to school-often a critical source of stability following periods of intense trauma.70 Immigrant students with disabilities also encounter significant obstacles, including inadequate access to legally mandated services such as bilingual special education classrooms, transportation, and translation and interpretation services, which are necessary to ensure the student's educational development.



Policy Priorities

ADDRESS THE SHORTAGE OF BILINGUAL EDUCATORS AND SUPPORT STAFF

Increase investment to certify and retain bilingual educators and bilingual support staff, such as counselors, social workers, and psychologists in schools.

EXTEND EDUCATION ACCESS FOR LATE-ARRIVAL STUDENTS

Allow older, late-arrival newcomer students to attend high school for at least four years and permit those with educational gaps to remain in school until the age of 23.

MODERNIZE FOUNDATION AID FUNDING FORMULA

Ensure that the state's need-based funding formula prioritizes equity and accurately reflects the current costs of providing academic, social-emotional, and holistic support to immigrant students and ELLs. This includes increasing the weight for ELLs, adding more weights for students with disabilities, as well as adding weights for those in temporary housing, the foster care system, and underserved, high-need ELLs. The formula should adequately represent the needs of low-income students, particularly those living

in poverty, and take into account the latest cost realities in both the base and index elements, especially in school districts with significant immigrant and ELL student populations.

BUILD STATEWIDE CAPACITY TO SERVE IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

Replicate comprehensive school and educator development initiatives led by experts in serving immigrant students, particularly newcomers, to increase the implementation of best practices.

INCREASE COLLEGE READINESS AND GRADUATION RATES

Invest in college preparation, dual enrollment, and career pathways programs for immigrant students, supported by knowledgeable counselors who understand the challenges of applying to higher education programs, regardless of immigration status.

IMPROVE LANGUAGE ACCESS

Promote language access best practices in schools and create statewide master contracts with high-quality providers of translation and interpretation services to expand access and reduce costs for districts.



Economic Justice

Vision

We envision a thriving New York where everyone, regardless of their birthplace, has the opportunity to succeed and contribute to their communities. Our vision recognizes that many of our immigrant workers are also raising the next generation of New Yorkers, and therefore encompasses not only fundamental workers' rights but also essential supports that help whole families thrive like child care, tax credits, financial literacy, English language education, and fair banking practices. Economic Justice means fully empowering immigrant workers with protections against harassment and wage theft, the right to collectively bargain, and access to training and education for skill-building and career advancement.

27% of New York's workforce. 71

During COVID, immigrants comprised

31% of workers

in New York's essential businesses.⁷²

Despite starting with median wages
of about \$23,000 annually, newly
arrived immigrants' economic impact
is substantial—and necessary. In their
first year, each 1,000 newly arrived
immigrant workers contributes

\$23 million

in wages and **\$2.6 million** in state and local taxes.⁷³

Over time, as they gain stability and improve their English skills, their wages rise—projected to reach \$31,000 annually after five years and

\$42,000 after **20** years.

This wage growth not only enhances their livelihoods but also boosts their tax contributions, which increase to \$3.5 million per 1,000 workers after five years.⁷⁴

Political, Social, and Economic Context

In recent years, New York has made significant strides in **expanding access to opportunities and family-supporting resources** for immigrants. Key advances include extending the New York Child Tax Credit to children under four,⁷⁵ extending eligibility for the Empire State Child Credit to more families,⁷⁶ giving New York City's undocumented families access to affordable child care through the Promise NYC program⁷⁷—which bridges the gap created by immigration status requirements in federal child care funding—and by modestly increasing Adult Literacy Education funding.⁷⁸

New immigrants are a vital economic engine, contributing significantly through their work, taxes, and life in our communities. Their presence significantly bolsters housing markets, creates jobs, and stimulates business growth, highlighting immigration as a key driver of local prosperity. Their impact is seen in revitalized cities in upstate New York, where immigrants have effectively reversed decades of population decline and economic stagnation. Deconomic engine,

New York State can fully harness immigrants' contributions by ensuring they have **equal access to the opportunities and resources** available to all New Yorkers. Many immigrants, particularly those without immigration status or on temporary visas, currently face restrictions that limit their access to federal benefits such as Medicaid and food assistance. New York should establish parallel programs, similar to New York City's Promise NYC, to ensure that all residents can benefit from these essential resources.⁸¹

New York has the opportunity to address the federal government's failure to adequately support its children and our future workforce. Nearly 1 in 5 children in New York lives in poverty⁸² and underinvestment in poverty alleviation leads to hunger, unstable housing, and unmet basic needs.⁸³ By

"New York State can fully harness immigrants' contributions by ensuring they have equal access to the opportunities and resources available to all New Yorkers."

investing in innovative solutions like expanded and simplified direct-to-family tax credits, New York can meet its goal of **cutting child poverty** in half over the next decade.⁸⁴ These measures will address widespread issues of poverty and affordability while alleviating unintended consequences, such as reduced benefits due to increased wages.⁸⁵

Access to affordable child care is crucial for a robust economy. Many parents struggle to find quality child care, limiting their ability to work and support their families. The excruciatingly high cost of child care, often exceeding \$21,000 annually, and the shortage of affordable options is partly driven by low wages for child care providers, many of whom are immigrants, with 12% living below the federal poverty line. While recent state investments in child care are promising, ensuring that all state-funded child care slots are available to every child, regardless of immigration status, would create more opportunities for families and strengthen the workforce.

Immigrant workers are crucial to driving economic growth and addressing labor shortages, especially given demographic shifts like an aging population. Because However, challenges such as skill mismatches persist. For example, from 2009 to 2013, 27% of the 878,000 highly skilled immigrants in New York were either working in low-skilled jobs or unemployed, which led to billions in lost earnings. New York can address workforce shortages, brain waste, and gaps in critical industries such as health care, technology, and skilled trades by better integrating skilled workers and upskilling new ones.

Expanding eligibility for workforce development programs to include individuals awaiting work authorization will ensure they are job-ready once approved. This strategy will help fill essential roles and capitalize on federal investments aimed at strengthening manufacturing, supply chains, and national security.

New York currently meets only 3% of the need for adult literacy, limiting opportunities for immigrants of all skill levels to secure better-paying jobs, support their families, and fully integrate into their communities. **Expanding access to adult literacy** would not only empower immigrants but also boost tax revenue, reduce reliance on social services, and unlock economic gains amounting to over 10% of New York City's GDP.⁹² Concurrently, providing English language instruction to immigrant workers already trained in skilled fields would help eliminate brain waste, where 27% of highly qualified immigrants are stuck in low-wage jobs.⁹³

New York can address unfair banking practices that limit financial resources for low-income communities and communities of color by promoting equitable access to banking services and business loans, ⁹⁴ leveling the playing field for immigrants and marginalized groups. Establishing public banks is an innovative solution, providing a vital alternative to traditional private banks and their history of redlining and racial discrimination. ⁹⁵ These public institutions can lower fees, expand services in underserved areas, and direct funds to local needs, boosting community investment and fostering economic growth and resilience.



Policy Priorities

BOLSTER ECONOMIC SECURITY

Extend all state-level tax benefits to include taxpayers who file with Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs) to address gaps in economic support and promote equity among working families. Enact the Working Families Tax Credit to ensure that all New York families have the support they need to thrive in the state.

EXPAND CHILD CARE ACCESS

Invest in a universal, free child care system that is accessible to all children, regardless of immigration status, to better support the 27% of the workforce who are immigrant workers.

INCREASE ADULT LITERACY

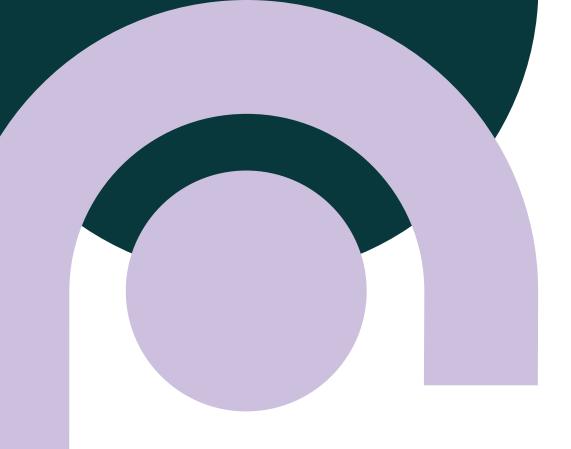
Enhance New York's efforts to tackle the adult literacy crisis by expanding services to reach 20% of the estimated 3.5 million adults who lack English language skills or a High School Equivalency Diploma.

STRENGTHEN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Fully fund the Office of Strategic Workforce Development to prioritize and integrate opportunities for immigrants, including those in emerging fields such as technology and green industries.

ESTABLISH FAIR BANKING PRACTICES

Enact legislation to establish municipal-level public banking infrastructure.



Healthy Communities

Vision

We envision a New York that **prioritizes the health and well-being of all residents**, regardless of immigration status, by addressing the interconnected needs of children, families, and individuals. Building healthy communities means investing in stable housing, accessible lifelong care, quality education, and climate resilience. We are committed to an **inclusive health system** that ensures insurance coverage, affordable and transparent care options, preventative services, emergency care, and mental health support for all. Our goal is to **eliminate barriers to safe and affordable housing** through inclusive support programs, stronger rental protections, and increased access to housing vouchers. By **empowering communities with the knowledge and tools** to navigate the health care system, we can create a state where every resident—regardless of background—has the opportunity to live a healthy and fulfilling life.

Foreign-born New Yorkers are **less likely** to have a regular primary care provider, with

25% lacking one

compared to **14% of U.S.-born adults.**They also face lower rates of preventive care, such as cancer screenings. ⁹⁶

25% of immigrant adults

who have received care in the U.S. say they have been **treated differently or unfairly by a doctor or other health care provider** because of their insurance status or ability to pay (16%); accent or ability to speak English (15%); and/or their race, ethnicity, or skin color (13%).

Foreign-born New Yorkers are more likely to live in overcrowded housing, with

22% of foreign-born households affected

compared to **7% of U.S. born households**. Additionally, 63% of
foreign-born residents are renters,
and immigrants...are more likely to
live in poorly maintained units. 98

Around 10% of low- and moderateincome immigrant residents live in

high-risk flood zones,

making them vulnerable to **climaterelated disasters**, which threaten their housing stability and health.⁹⁹

Political, Social, and Economic Context

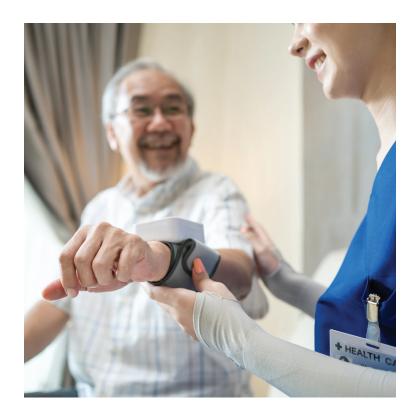
New York has long been a leader in providing supportive health and social safety net programs to individuals and families in need. However, decades of policies at the federal, state, and local levels have perpetuated economic inequities, limited educational access, entrenched housing segregation, and weakened climate resilience—factors that have worsened health outcomes for immigrant and BIPOC communities.¹⁰⁰

Immigrant communities continue to face systemic barriers that exacerbate health disparities, including limited access to affordable care, delays in treatment, and higher rates of uninsurance. 101 Social factors such as poverty, environmental hazards, and harmful immigration policies contribute to poor health outcomes and financial strain from medical debt. New York must implement policies that expand access to health care, address the root causes of inequality, and ensure all residents, regardless of immigration status, have equitable access to informed care.

Although New York has made progress in expanding Medicaid to undocumented individuals aged 65 and older and extending postpartum care in 2023, immigration status remains a major barrier. An estimated 255,000 uninsured New Yorkers aged 19–64 continue to be ineligible for coverage, leaving them vulnerable to worse health outcomes and higher emergency care costs. Expanding coverage to this population could not only improve health but also save the state up to \$500 million annually in emergency Medicaid spending.¹⁰²

In addition to increasing eligibility and access to insurance, New York must also **reduce the cost** of preventive and continuing health services and medications, expand essential mental, reproductive, and sexual health services, and invest in responsive community and emergency services. We must also increase health services in rural areas

"New York must implement policies that expand access to health care, address the root causes of inequality, and ensure all residents, regardless of immigration status, have equitable access to informed care."



and support community-based programs. Additionally, maternal mortality rates, especially among immigrant and BIPOC individuals, 103 underscore the urgent need for systemic change. Too many health issues are preventable with proper care, yet medical and structural racism continues to block access to the treatment and support our communities deserve.

To help immigrant communities navigate health systems and make informed decisions, New York must invest in **culturally and linguistically accessible services.** ¹⁰⁴ Limited health literacy, ¹⁰⁵ compounded by language and cultural barriers and a lack of understanding of medical procedures and preventive care, make it harder for many to access and utilize essential services. ¹⁰⁶ Additionally, stigma surrounding mental health and a shortage of culturally competent care prevent many from seeking the support they need. ¹⁰⁷

Stable, permanent housing is a critical determinant of health and well-being. When housing is secure, families experience fewer health crises, reduced reliance on emergency services, educational benefits, and improved economic stability. However, New York continues to face

a housing crisis, with over 150,000 residents experiencing homelessness and 175,000 at risk of eviction in 2024.¹⁰⁹ Many who are housed live in overcrowded or substandard conditions, worsening both physical and mental health outcomes and compounding the challenges immigrant communities already face.¹¹⁰

The lack of strong regulations and renter protections not only heightens general safety risks but also makes residents more vulnerable to climate-change-driven storms and their impacts.¹¹¹ Many BIPOC individuals, seniors, and low-income families live in unregulated basement apartments and high-risk flood zones. 112 Climate displacement and climate gentrification are particularly devastating for undocumented immigrants, who live and work in climate-impacted areas and are often excluded from federal and state disaster relief programs. Without access to critical support, they face the risk of losing their homes, businesses, health, and even their lives in the wake of increasing climate disasters. Addressing these disparities is crucial to creating healthy communities for all.

Policy Priorities

EXPAND ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Increase the availability of bilingual mental health providers in the most spoken languages among immigrant communities and allocate funding to immigrant-focused CBOs to create culturally competent healing spaces.

PROVIDE HEALTH COVERAGE FOR ALL

Raise the poverty level eligibility to 250% under the Coverage for All waiver (1332) and ensure that all immigrants, regardless of their status, receive comprehensive health coverage.

INCREASE ACCESS TO CARE

Increase mobile clinics and coordinate health visits from local clinics to expand access in rural and farming areas and to serve homebound and disabled immigrant individuals.

HELP NEW YORKERS NAVIGATE THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Launch targeted statewide campaigns to help individuals navigate the enrollment and re-enrollment process, improving rates, utilization, and overall knowledge.

PRIORITIZE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATION

Protect and prioritize community-accessible and affordable comprehensive reproductive and sexual health services, including family planning, contraception, prenatal and postnatal care, sexually transmitted infection prevention and treatment, and health education. Ensure continued coverage for all reproductive and sexual health needs and secure the expansion of culturally and linguistically competent services, such as midwifery and doula care, to provide equitable, individualized support.

ENSURE HOUSING ACCESSIBILITY & QUALITY

Increase the housing voucher budget allocation to \$250 million, specifically targeting mixed-status families, to ensure that housing assistance adequately accounts for family size.

INCREASE TENANT PROTECTIONS

Enhance landlord accountability through stronger legislation and effective implementation measures, including education, monitoring, and penalties, while specifically addressing the challenges posed by unregulated basement apartments.

STRENGTHEN CLIMATE RESILIENCE THROUGH INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES

Foster climate adaptability and resilience by prioritizing and centering frontline communities across the state. This includes investing in affordable, climate-resilient housing; creating linguistically accessible emergency plans; offering immigrant-inclusive climate education, disaster relief, and recovery; and improving health care access to address climate-related health impacts.





Conclusion

Immigration remains the beating heart of New York and the United States. New York is uniquely positioned to lead in building dynamic, inclusive 21st-century communities—a role it has played and benefited from, since the era of Ellis Island to the recent economic revitalization of cities like Utica and Buffalo. If our state chooses to honor its rich history as a welcoming community and a global hub for commerce, innovation, and culture, New York will continue to thrive—in every way. But we cannot realize this future without immigration—and communities that effectively embrace and integrate newcomers, helping them acquire language skills, leverage their talents, and navigate support systems. Embracing this opportunity fosters innovation and strengthens the fabric of our diverse communities, inspiring humane, sustainable, and effective immigration policies that uplift everyone.

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Call to Action

Support the NYIC in advancing equal rights, quality education, stable housing, and health care for all New Yorkers. Your donations and volunteer efforts are vital to our work, helping to create a united future where everyone can thrive. Every contribution—whether time or funds—brings us closer to this vision.

Visit our website to donate or get involved today!



Support our Cause



Become a Member



Get Involved Volunteer



In our advocacy efforts, some of our policy priorities include specific dollar amounts to ensure that essential programs receive adequate funding, which reflects the real costs associated with implementing these initiatives. These concrete figures help clarify the financial commitment required for tangible progress. However, other policy priorities focus on policy changes or structural reforms that may not have a direct monetary value attached. While these policy priorities may not specify dollar amounts, they are equally crucial in creating a supportive environment for immigrant communities.

As you read this report, please take note of the differences between policy priorities with specific dollar amounts and those without, keeping in mind that these figures may evolve over time to reflect changing needs and circumstances.

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