

FY2025 City Budget Priorities

As FY25 budget negotiations continue, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI), our clients, and our partners have identified top legislative and budget priorities to advance Disability, Environmental, and Health Justice in New York City. Each of these initiatives is feasible and necessary if we are to meet the intersecting challenges of racial injustice, social inequality, disability discrimination, and an accelerating climate crisis. We look forward to working with lawmakers to make these priorities a lived reality in the coming year.

Disability Justice

1. Use the funds allocated for the City's failing B-HEARD pilot to vastly improve the program and ensure that it is truly a non-police mental health crisis response program.

After over two years of piloting, the City's B-HEARD program - which was intended to be a non-police response to mental health crises - continues to dispatch police to more than 80% of mental health crisis calls. For a city where 20 individuals experiencing mental health crises have been killed at the hands of the police in the last eight years alone – the most recent of which occurred just last week -- B-HEARD does virtually nothing to address the enormous dangers which individuals with mental disabilities face.

NYLPI urges full funding for a truly non-police model of the sort proposed by Correct Crisis Intervention Today - NYC (CCIT-NYC) that, unlike B-HEARD, will:

- A) Use the federal 988 hotline rather than the police-run 911 system;
- B) Engage community members and individuals with lived mental health experience in the design, implementation, and oversight of crisis response — and most crucially as members of the crisis response teams;
- C) Be available 24/7; and

D) Have a response time comparable to that of other crises.

Environmental Justice

1. Fully and transparently implement the Commercial Waste Zones system citywide.

We are concerned that DSNY has set a timeframe to implement only one of twenty zones and has not yet published details including the awardees' waste reduction and recycling plans, worker and public safety plans, expected VMT reductions, and which recycling, transfer, and composting facilities awardees will utilize. The clear intent of Local Law 199 of 2019 is a citywide transition to an efficient, safe, sustainable, and accountable system and we must not treat the rollout as a "pilot" that will fail to achieve the necessary scale to transform a broken system.

DSNY's budget must commit ample staff and resources to enforcement of commercial and organics rules to ensure businesses are properly source-separating recyclable materials, food waste, and unsold food for donation or composting, and that the private waste industry is providing transparent, easily accessible, and affordable recycling composting services to all businesses covered by the law.

2. Make immediate investments in renewable energy, battery storage, and sustainable waste infrastructure on Rikers Island and stop the expansion of the Rikers power plant.

We applaud Speaker Adams the City Council for continuing to push for the closure of the Rikers Island jail and the transfer of land on Rikers Island from the Department of Corrections to DCAS as mandated by the Renewable Rikers Act of 2021. The planned use of Rikers Island for renewable energy generation, energy storage, and sustainable waste management solutions cannot come soon enough as New Yorkers as the downstate electric grid continues to rely on highly polluting and expensive fossil fuel Peaker Plants clustered in the same communities that suffer from the worst impacts of mass incarceration.

We are therefore deeply concerned that DOC is moving forward with an application to increase air pollution emissions from a gas-powered cogeneration plant on Rikers Island that has been operating under an expired Title V air permit since 2018. DOC has budgeted \$3,655,093 for maintenance of the Riker's cogenerating power plant this year alone and does not report the consultancy and other costs that the agency may be paying to pursue changes to the existing power plant air pollution permit. We urge the Council to ensure that this misguided project is specifically excluded from the FY25 budget and to push DOC to refocus on meeting the mandated timeline to close the jail.

3. Ensure that Local Law 97 is implemented equitably, with protections for tenants and safeguards against false solutions.

Thanks to oversight from the City Council, we learned last December that the City's own buildings are not in compliance with the emissions reduction mandates of Local Law 97. This is unacceptable given the urgent need for public sector leadership as a spiraling climate crisis impacts New Yorkers more severely and more frequently with each passing year.

We hope to work closely with the Council, the Mayor's office, and the City's state representatives to advocate for unprecedented levels of investment in proven solutions including building efficiency retrofits, robust demand response programs, building electrification, and aggressive expansions of renewable energy, storage, and transmission capacity in the City.

We remain concerned that for-profit companies continue to promote unproven, energy-intensive technologies like carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS) as "quick fixes" to our city's emissions reductions law, when in fact these false climate solutions may exacerbate energy consumption and may create additional health and safety risks for local communities. We urge the Council to remain vigilant that these false solutions are not subsidized or funded by local or state subsidies or tax abatements intended to help building owners reduce emissions.

Health Justice

1. Continue the Immigrant Health Initiative (IHI), which has directly supported programs aimed at improving the health and well-being of immigrant New Yorkers and their families through health education, outreach, and sustained policy advocacy.

IHI funding has led to increased enrollment by eligible immigrants in state-funded Medicaid and the Essential Plan with life-changing and often life-saving effects for our clients. In 2023, NYLPI was able to provide immigration and health screenings to 143 seriously ill people in the community and in detention, provided direct legal representation for over 60 cases, and obtained state-funded healthcare for more than 30 previously uninsured immigrants. IHI funding also allowed NYLPI to advocate on behalf of over 20 clients who, even with our support in becoming eligible for state-funded healthcare, needed further advocacy with healthcare administration entities to ensure their enrollment.

2. Invest in organ transplantation access for immigrant and low-income New Yorkers who face barriers to accessing this form of life-saving medical care.

As documented in [our report](#) “They Can Donate But They Can’t Receive,” low-income and undocumented New Yorkers can and do donate organs but face major barriers to receiving life-saving kidney transplants at private hospitals and are often forced to spend years undergoing expensive and debilitating dialysis treatment.

The City should budget for the passage of Int 1250 of 2023, a bill that would create an Office of Transplant Equity within the Department of Health to ensure that patients at Health and Hospitals and other safety net institutions can access transplant care. The Council should also advance a State Legislation Resolution to ensure the continuity of the kidney transplantation program at University Hospital at SUNY Downstate (SUNY Downstate), the only safety-net organ transplantation program in New York City and the only transplantation program in the borough of Brooklyn.

The proposed restructuring of SUNY Downstate Medical Center could come at an immense cost to low-income, Black, immigrant New York City residents from across the city who need kidney transplants. These communities already face substantial barriers to accessing organ transplants, particularly at the city’s voluntary hospitals. The loss of this transplant center could result in increased mortality in communities already overburdened by a lack of access to medical care and chronic illness.

3. Support Coverage4All via a Resolution in support of S2237B a bill that amends the approved 1332 State Innovation Waiver to include coverage for undocumented New Yorkers.

NYLPI and our communities recognize that the greatest barrier to improving health outcomes for immigrant and undocumented New Yorkers is the inability to enroll in public health insurance like Medicaid and the Essential Plan. Coverage4All is a fiscally sound legislation that would save New York City and State millions of dollars, and substantially improve the health of New York City residents who currently rely on emergency services and city public hospitals to meet complex healthcare needs.

For more information on our work, contact Director of Policy Justin Wood at jwood@nylpi.org.

Founded 45 years ago, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) pursues equality and justice for all New Yorkers. Our work activates the power of New York communities as they lead the fight to make equal justice a reality. We strive to create equal access to healthcare, achieve equality of opportunity and self-determination for people with disabilities, ensure immigrant opportunity, strengthen local non-profits, and secure environmental justice for low-income communities of color.

151 West 30th Street, 11th Floor New York, NY 10001-4017 | Voice and TDD: 212-244-4664 | F: 212-244-4570 | www.nylpi.org