



# STATE OF THE STATE 2026

GOVERNOR KATHY HOCHUL

# **STATE OF THE STATE**

# **2026**

**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 2026.

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



# Foreword

Fellow New Yorkers,

Over the past four years, I've traveled to every corner of this state—listening to your stories, walking your neighborhoods, and learning what it really means to build a life here. Those conversations—with parents, workers, students, business owners, seniors—have shaped every decision I've made as Governor.

They've also made one thing unmistakably clear: New Yorkers are resilient, ambitious, and deeply committed to this state. But too many families are still under real strain. The cost of living is high. The pace of change is relentless. And decisions being made far beyond our borders are increasingly shaping daily life here at home.

That's why I've said from the beginning: **Your family is my fight.** And in this moment, when the future feels full of promise, but under real threat: **your future is my fight as well.**

Together, we have taken a state emerging from crisis and powered a comeback that few believed was possible. We've driven down crime and strengthened public safety where New Yorkers feel it most. We've secured the most significant housing reforms in half a century, rebuilt long-neglected infrastructure, and made historic investments in clean energy, advanced manufacturing, and the technologies shaping the global economy. We've expanded child care, lowered costs for working families, protected access to health care, and defended fundamental rights when they came under attack.

You can see the results across New York. Our streets are busier. Our businesses are growing. Long-stalled projects are moving forward. Confidence is back. **New York isn't just recovering. New York is rising.**

But progress is not guaranteed. And it does not sustain itself. It has to be built on a foundation that's strong enough to last. That's why we've been careful and disciplined about how we invest.

Thanks to a strong economy and responsible financial management, we're able to make historic investments in housing, infrastructure, and opportunity without raising taxes on working families or saddling the next generation with debt. We've strengthened our reserves, reduced long-term liabilities, and protected New York's fiscal health, so we can keep delivering for families today and decades from now.

That strength matters—because the road ahead will test it.

Today, New York faces serious headwinds. Reckless federal actions are pushing up costs, threatening jobs, and putting critical investments at risk. Efforts to divide, exclude, and roll back hard-won rights are testing the values that have long defined our state. And too many families are still asking the same fundamental question: *Can we afford to build our future here?*

This book is our answer.

The 2026 State of the State agenda is grounded in a simple belief: **government should make life more affordable, keep people safe, and expand opportunity—not shrink it.** It lays out a clear, actionable plan to meet the challenges families face today, while preparing New York for the road ahead.

That starts with affordability—from a concrete roadmap for universal child care, to lowering energy bills, protecting consumers, and confronting the rising costs that hit working families hardest. It means continuing to invest in public safety with strategies that work—including targeted enforcement, cutting-edge technology, and a mental health system that treats people with dignity while keeping communities secure. It means building faster and smarter—whether we’re talking about homes, infrastructure, clean energy, or the industries of the future—while respecting local communities and protecting our environment.

And it means defending fundamental rights not just in words, but in law—ensuring access to healthcare, safeguarding trusted public health standards, strengthening food security, and standing firm against efforts that tear families and communities apart.

At its core, this agenda reflects a choice about who we want to be.

New York has never been a state that shrinks from big challenges. When we and the nation have been tested—from Saratoga to Seneca Falls, from Stonewall to Ground Zero—New Yorkers have stepped forward. We don’t back down. We build, we fight—and we lead.

The State of the State is not a wish list. It is a blueprint rooted in lived experience, shaped by hard lessons, and driven by a belief that our best days are still ahead.

Because **your family is my fight.**

And **your future is my fight.**

**Governor Kathy Hochul**

**January 2026**

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# Chapter 1: Making New York More Affordable

Affordability isn't a statistic. It's a balancing act. Every day, New Yorkers have to contend with how much things cost: our rent, our bills, our groceries, our basics. When tariffs and taxes go up, we struggle; when our lives change, like with the birth of a child, we have to rebalance all over again.

Governor Hochul is committed to making New York a place where all our families can afford to live. Since taking office, she has moved aggressively to put money back where it belongs—in the pockets of working people. Her administration has:

- Cut middle-class taxes to their lowest rates in 70 years, ensuring families keep more of the money they earn.
- Raised New York's minimum wage and tied future increases to inflation, so a day's work covers a day's needs.
- Tripled the Child Tax Credit, providing families up to \$1,000 per child under the age of four beginning in 2026, and up to \$500 for school-aged children beginning in 2027.
- Made school meals free for every student, saving families \$1,600 per child every year and making sure no child goes hungry at school.
- Sent Inflation Refund checks to 8.2 million New Yorkers—up to \$200 for individuals and up to \$400 for families.
- Increased the maximum weekly unemployment benefit by \$300 a week so people can focus on finding work, not keeping the lights on.

In 2026 Governor Hochul is doubling down on these efforts in ways people can feel. By committing to universal child care across the state, cheaper auto and home insurance, more affordable housing, lower energy bills, and bolstered programs that help put food on the table, she's building a state that works for the people who work for a living.

## *Providing Universal Child Care*

Access to high-quality, affordable child care is foundational to the well-being and success of New York's children, parents, and economy. Across New York State, families are grappling with crushingly high child care costs that can amount to an average of \$20,000 per year per family. This means that a family needs to earn upwards of \$285,000 to afford child care in New York under federal affordability guidelines—placing reliable, quality care well beyond the reach of most working families.

These onerous costs can deflate a family's hard-won savings, force decisions between putting food on the table and paying for child care, and pull parents—and especially moms—away from contributing to the economy. Nearly a third of women in New York City leave the workforce due to lack of affordable child care options. Studies show that implementing universal affordable child care in New York could increase labor force participation by as many as 28,000 additional workers, leading to as much as \$1.6 billion in additional wages across the state.

Governor Hochul has spent the past four years taking aggressive steps to expand access to and funding for child care in New York State. Now she is putting New York on a path to universal child care statewide, through a comprehensive plan that recognizes family preferences for child care options, supports a wide ecosystem of child care providers—spanning from traditional day care centers to smaller, home-based providers that provide flexible, affordable care for families—and supports the expansion of Pre-K across the state.

Over time, the State will continue to build its child care capacity, invest in the child care workforce, and identify opportunities to enlist employers as partners to create a comprehensive system that serves the needs of families across the state. This builds on the administration's efforts to date and recommendations of the State's Child Care Availability Task Force.

Since taking office, Governor Hochul has taken dramatic steps to expand access to affordable child care for families, laying the groundwork for the implementation of universal child care statewide. Specifically, under her leadership the State already has:

- More than doubled the number of children served by child care vouchers in just four years, with a close to 25 percent increase in the past 12 months alone.

- Provided more than \$8.6 billion for child care, including more than doubling funding for child care vouchers for New York families.
- Dramatically expanded the number of families who are eligible for vouchers by increasing the maximum income from 200 percent of the federal poverty level (roughly \$64,000 for a family of four) to the maximum allowed under federal law—85 percent of statewide median income (roughly \$114,000 for a family of four).
- Made child care more affordable by reducing the amount paid by those receiving vouchers by capping costs at \$15 per week for most families.
- Increased reimbursement rates for child care providers by nearly 50%, helping providers retain staff and provide quality care for children across the state.
- Supported the future creation of thousands of child care seats and new centers through more than \$150 million in capital funding.

Combined, these investments have helped rescue a critical sector ravaged by the pandemic, while supporting the expansion of access to child care for tens of thousands of new families across the state.

In 2026, Governor Hochul is putting New York State on a pathway toward achieving universal, affordable child care, beginning with committing to investments that will deliver affordable child care to nearly 100,000 additional children.

The Governor's landmark investment will increase funding by \$1.7 billion on top of the significant increases previously made, and make a critical downpayment towards ensuring statewide universal access to prekindergarten for four-year-olds ("Pre-K"), supporting the State's early childhood workforce, and partnering with New York City to launch a nation-first 2-Care program and finally realize the promise of universal access to 3K in New York City. This funding will support a diverse set of counties to build out new demonstration projects that offer truly universal care, reaching tens of thousands of more families with vouchers for affordable care. Alongside these commitments, the Governor will launch an Office of Child Care and Early Education to steer the implementation of high-quality, universal child care for New York families.

## **Achieving Truly Universal Pre-K**

Governor Hochul is extending the promise of universal Pre-K for four-year-olds across New York State by the start of the 2028-29 school year, for all families who want this option for their child. While many children across the state are already participating in early learning opportunities through existing Pre-K programs, too many families don't have the opportunity to access high-quality Pre-K. As a result, families may be forced to pay for or otherwise cover another year of care for their children.

To ensure districts and educators across the state have the resources they need to provide high-quality Pre-K in response to family preference, Governor Hochul will significantly increase the State's contribution for Pre-K seats—both for the 115,000 existing seats and for new seats that increase access going forward. By creating a uniform statewide Pre-K grant funded at the higher of either \$10,000 or the district's current selected Foundation Aid per pupil, this administration will ensure that all districts have the resources needed to recruit educators, maintain quality, and meet local demand.

Universal Pre-K has been demonstrated to transform the lives of participating children and parents. Children participating in Pre-K programs show higher rates of both kindergarten readiness and long-term academic achievement, including graduation rates, according to several longitudinal studies. As to parents, one study of universal Pre-K access found that Pre-K programs boosted parental earnings by over 20 percent, noting that each dollar dedicated to Pre-K returned \$10 in societal benefits.

This Pre-K expansion reflects a commitment of approximately half a billion dollars and will ensure that every child in New York State has the opportunity to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

## **Launching 2-Care for New York City Families**

New York City has already launched universal Pre-K and 3K, and Governor Hochul will partner with the city to launch an unprecedented initiative to offer entirely free child care for two-year-olds within New York City serving all children, including students with disabilities and English language learners. The Governor will offer state support to pilot and then scale 2-Care to reach all eligible children within four years of launch.

Initial pilots will focus on high-need areas selected by New York City and will be expected to reach approximately 2,000 children this fall, growing to over 30,000 children at full implementation. 2-Care promises to have a transformative impact on reducing family costs, expanding care options, and setting New York City's children on a trajectory towards a brighter future.

## **Reaching Universal 3K Access within New York City**

In addition to the launch of 2-Care in New York City, the Governor will partner with the city to strengthen the city's 3K program. 3K has been a lifeline to the families it has served, linking high-quality seats to families navigating the costs and scarcity of child care access in New York City; however, it has faced challenges in implementation, and faces pockets where supply outstrips demand. To achieve 3K's promise of offering universal access to neighborhood options for families and reducing costs for families across the city, Governor Hochul and the city will partner to strengthen the program to meet demand.

## **Continuing to Expand the Child Care Assistance Program for Families Statewide**

Under Governor Hochul's leadership, New York has expanded access to and more than doubled the State's investment in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which provides subsidies to help low-income families across the state access child care. By dramatically increasing the State's funding for the program while expanding eligibility to more New York families, the program now supports 2.5 times more children—an additional 100,000—than when Governor Hochul took office; the number of children served has increased by almost 25% in the past year alone. Most of the families of the 170,000 children served by the program pay no more than \$15 a week for child care.

This year, Governor Hochul will continue to grow the State's investment in the CCAP program, with a \$1.2 billion increased investment, bringing the total available for subsidies to over \$3 billion. This is 3.6 times more than the \$832 million provided prior to the Governor taking office, and a nearly 40 percent increase from what was made available in the FY 2026 Enacted Budget. This will provide families and child care providers across the state additional support to serve more of New York's children.

## **Piloting Innovative Community Care Models**

In 2026, Governor Hochul will launch innovative new pilot projects for families and children in a limited number of counties around the state that are also eager to launch child care in more expansive ways in their communities. These counties will join a new New York State demonstration project, designed to support counties in working towards universal access across their community, regardless of income.

Programs will be a joint collaboration among participating counties, local child care coordinating entities, and New York State. Child care providers in chosen jurisdictions will be able to enter into contracts that draw down on state and local funding. This structure will facilitate providers to sustainably expand their capacity to reach more families, and counties to help ensure that care is meeting family needs. These pilots will offer opportunities to serve all families in selected counties without the administrative hurdle of means-testing.

## **Helping Defray Child Care Costs by Overhauling the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit**

New York State's Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit helps put money back in families' pockets by reimbursing for the cost of child care. Last year alone, the credit provided roughly \$100 million to families across the state, helping alleviate the enormous cost burden of child care.

With recent federal changes impacting the equivalent federal credit, Governor Hochul will seek legislation that will uncouple New York State's credit from the federal tax code so that it can be expanded and simplified. These changes will provide an additional average benefit of roughly \$575 for roughly 230,000 tax filers. These changes will offer a lifeline to families across the state, helping further alleviate the crush of child care costs.

## **Launching the Office of Child Care and Early Education to Drive Universal Child Care**

As New York State continues to prioritize care and learning for our youngest New Yorkers,

Governor Hochul will launch a new Office of Child Care and Early Education that will be charged with driving the implementation of high-quality, universal child care in New York State. The Office will manage and support long-term planning with a focus on both access and quality, including implementation of universal Pre-K, continued investment in 3-K, launch of NYC 2-Care and other innovative care options, expansion and improvement of CCAP, and ongoing support for the workforce. The Office will ensure quality even as access grows, serving as a single, accountable body for the implementation of universal child care across the state level, and elevating the ongoing importance of this work.

## **Supporting Our Farmers' Families and Children**

New York's farming community is dependent on the hardworking families who sustain our food system. To ensure these children have a safe, nurturing place to grow while their parents are in the fields, Governor Hochul will increase New York's commitment to the Agri-Business Child Development (ABCD) Centers, a network of 13 centers that provide 1,000 children with child care, nutritious meals, and a foundation for lifelong learning. Increasing these centers' capacity will also provide parents with essential resources like assistance lines and family support services.

## **Making It Easier to Provide Child Care**

Child care programs are regulated through multiple state and local agencies, leading to overlapping and potentially conflicting regulatory challenges. Collectively, these processes make it more difficult and expensive to open, run, and staff child care centers at a moment when the State needs to be working to increase supply. Governor Hochul will ensure state-level agencies do a full review of relevant regulations and policies to ensure the State reduces barriers that make it harder to provide child care while also ensuring rigorous safety standards and fiscal oversight, and will ask localities to do the same. The Governor will also provide guidance and support to localities interested in adapting their own regulations and policies to better accommodate and expand high-quality child care.

## **Engaging with Employers as Partners**

Many of New York's employers are eager to address the child care needs of their employees, and are trying innovative approaches of their own—from subsidies to reduce the costs of care for their workforce, to on-site child care. In order to bring more employers to the table on child care, the State is also undertaking a thorough review of existing tax incentives for employers with the goal of helping them better serve the child care needs of their employees.

## **Supporting the Workforce through Early Childhood Educator Preparation**

Governor Hochul's plan to strengthen New York's early childhood education workforce focuses on a multi-tiered effort to expand access to funding, credentials, and training pathways. The proposals include expanding the Masters in Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship, increasing the number of teachers benefiting, and making the program work for early childhood educators. In addition, to open more low-cost options for these educators, New York will seek to classify early childhood education as an in-demand occupation for purposes of program eligibility for new federal Workforce Pell grants when available, and expand part-time Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) aid for students in approved non-degree teaching and child care programs.

In addition to expanding access to different aid streams, Governor Hochul will direct SUNY and CUNY to embed the Child Development Associate credential, where applicable, within credit-bearing early childhood programs. She will also charge them with establishing a unified system for recognizing prior learning and experience among the early childhood workforce, many of whom have been doing this work without recognition for decades. Finally, SUNY and CUNY will be directed to develop microcredentials in inclusive education and multilingual literacy to better prepare the workforce for a broader set of learners.

## **Boosting Awareness of the Child Tax Credit (CTC)**

New York's 2026 budget included a historic expansion of the state's child tax credit, also known as the Empire State Child Credit (ESCC), providing critical financial support for more than 2.75

million children statewide. This latest expansion increases the credit from \$330 per child to \$1,000 annually per child under four starting in 2026, and to \$500 per child aged four to 16 starting in 2027, which represent the largest increases in the credit's history. These enhancements can help defray the cost of child care, put more food on the table, and help families save.

To ensure as many New Yorkers as possible benefit from the expanded credit, Governor Hochul will take a whole-of-government approach to ensuring that eligible individuals are accessing the full benefit of a credit that can help transform lives.

## *Cutting Auto Insurance Costs*

Onerously high auto insurance costs are another bill that is squeezing New Yorker's pocketbooks and contributing to the rising cost of living. New York drivers see their wallets sapped by an average of \$336 per month for auto insurance, representing some of the highest costs in the nation. Over a year, a family with one car will pay out an average of roughly \$4,030 annually for full coverage—nearly \$1,500 above the national average of roughly \$2,680. In portions of the state, like New York City, costs rise to more than double national averages. According to Experian, average auto insurance rates in Brooklyn and the Bronx hover around \$6,000 per year—surpassing 10 percent of the median family income for a Bronx family.

Sky-high auto insurance rates also impact non-driving New Yorkers, raising the price of a cab or a ride-share. Crushing auto insurance costs shouldered by small businesses—like the plumber driving out to a house call, the restaurant dispatching a takeout order, or the beverage distributor delivering to the supermarket—filter down to consumers, translating into a higher cost of living across the state. Even mass transit is impacted by high auto insurance rates, with state transit agencies shelling out at least \$50 million annually in insurance costs for bus and paratransit services.

New York's hefty auto insurance rates are a result of a morass of outdated, overly complex laws that raise costs for consumers without necessarily translating to fairer outcomes in the case of an accident. Too often fraudulent and bad actors treat New York's insurance system—with our anomalous laws—as an open invitation to scam law-abiding drivers by staging elaborate crashes and

reaping large payouts.

The costs of those payouts are passed on to law-abiding drivers through higher insurance rates for all. Over the past two years both commercial and private auto insurance companies have ended up paying out more in claims than they collected in premiums, forcing up premiums across all consumers.

Governor Hochul is proposing a series of common-sense reforms targeted at combating fraud and stymieing bad actors, which will lower costs while ensuring genuine victims are entitled to justice and restitution. Such reforms have the power to not only prevent the inexorable rise in premium costs, but over time actually reduce rates for drivers.

## **Lowering Rates by Cracking Down on Fraud**

Fraud is a major driver of elevated auto insurance premiums. Increasingly sophisticated actors stage elaborate accidents, designed to allow for “jackpot” payouts from insurance companies or jury awards. These schemes imperil the safety of honest drivers, cause property damage, and increase rates for drivers across the state. Increasingly, scams go beyond just one bad actor at the wheel and are orchestrated by organized criminal conspiracies.

Unfortunately, these scams are becoming more prevalent. In 2023, the latest year for which statistics are available, there were 1,729 staged crashes in New York State, which ranks second highest in the nation for incidents of staged fraud. In total, insurance carriers reported 38,270 incidents of suspected motor vehicle insurance fraud to the New York State Department of Financial Services (DFS) Insurance Frauds Bureau in 2023—a record high. According to the Insurance Information Institute, staged crashes and associated insurance fraud inflate everyone’s premiums by as much as \$300 per year on average.

To combat these organized criminal efforts, Governor Hochul is taking a whole-of-government approach to cracking down on auto insurance fraud. The Governor will reinvigorate the State’s Motor Vehicle Theft and Insurance Fraud Prevention Board, empowering it to redouble its efforts toward zealously investigating and prosecuting insurance fraud across the state. This will include directly tasking DFS, the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and the New York State Police (NYSP) with a more proactive and coordinated

approach to enforcement, including dedicated resources and staff at both DFS and NYSP focused on auto insurance, and ensuring coordination in law enforcement response.

As the State investigates and builds cases against scammers and fraudsters, the Governor will ensure her agencies are partnering with prosecutors statewide to ensure crimes are not going unpunished. To equip prosecutors with the tools they need to shut down organized crime rings, Governor Hochul will offer legislation to ensure prosecutors can seek criminal penalties against any individual responsible for organizing a staged accident, not just the particular individual behind the wheel. Working hand in hand with district attorneys across New York, the State will seek to help build cases that put an end to the organized fraud that's robbing New Yorkers via elevated insurance rates.

Governor Hochul will also advance additional efforts to take on medical providers who participate in fraud by signing off on phony medical diagnoses that result in enormous payouts. Governor Hochul will direct the State to increase medical licensure enforcement for fraud, increasing the probability that these white-collar crimes lead to temporary or permanent licensure loss for the providers who commit them.

State agencies will also seek to take action when New York drivers illegally register their vehicles in other states, which artificially decreases their coverage and raises costs for law-abiding New York drivers.

## **Strengthening Insurer Anti-Fraud Programs**

Insurance companies must play a central role in tackling fraudulent behavior that targets their policyholders. However, current law handcuffs insurers' ability to protect their law-abiding customers against fraud and abuse by capping to just 30 days the time they have to identify, investigate, and report instances of fraud.

To ensure fraud is being identified and punished, the Governor will increase the timeframe insurers have to report fraud and reduce barriers to alleging fraud in court, giving insurers more time to investigate claims and avoid paying fraudulent ones. Legislation will balance increased flexibility to crack down on fraud with the need to preserve crucial consumer protections, such as allowing policyholders to collect two percent interest on any payment insurers hold back, as an incentive to ensure insurers continue to move quickly on evaluating genuine claims.

## **Limiting Damages for Individuals Engaging in Unlawful Behavior at the Time of an Accident**

When drivers are engaging in unlawful behavior at the time of an incident, they shouldn't be able to win sizable insurance payouts. However, current law permits individuals committing crimes, including impaired driving, to receive generous payouts—including for pain and suffering and emotional distress—which are paid from the premiums contributed by law-abiding drivers.

Governor Hochul will cap the payout on these types of non-economic damages for drivers engaging in criminal behavior at the time of the incident. Specific crimes that would warrant the capping of damages include:

- Uninsured motorists, who have violated state financial responsibility laws, contributing to additional cost in the insurance market;
- Individuals convicted of driving while impaired at the time of the incident; and
- Individuals committing a felony (or fleeing one) at the time of an incident.

## **Limiting Damages for Individuals Who Are “Mostly” at Fault in Causing an Accident**

New York is in a minority of states that allow drivers that are deemed “mostly” at fault in an accident to still collect extensive damages, including non-economic damages described above. This means that in New York, even the driver deemed mostly at fault for an accident can walk away with a sizable payout for that accident. In contrast, most states—including Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts and New Jersey—have common-sense rules that only permit recovery of damages if a plaintiff is not primarily at fault for the accident.

Governor Hochul will seek changes to New York’s laws that will limit the non-economic damages a driver can obtain if they are mostly at fault for an accident, introducing a measure of accountability into who is compensated by insurance after an incident.

## **Tightening the Serious Injury Threshold**

New York's no-fault insurance law allows for individuals injured in an auto accident to make claims for compensation that stretches beyond reimbursement for the medical expenses or lost wages associated with an injury. This additional compensation is intended to offer support for the pain and suffering of victims with serious injuries. The "serious injury" threshold is intended to screen out minor injuries from personal injury litigation, in keeping with the original intent of the no-fault law to reserve litigation only for auto accidents causing serious harm.

However, New York's legal definition of what constitutes serious injury is vague, applied inconsistently, and can include temporary injuries that only sideline an individual for a short time following an accident rather than the more significant injuries that would merit further payouts. Without a fair and firm definition of "serious injury," individuals without significant harms may try to game the system to win astronomically high "jackpot" awards from courts associated with these harms—raising rates for everyone else.

The Governor will reform the serious injury threshold by proposing objective and fair medical standards for what qualifies to meet this definition. This will create clear and objective criteria for what constitutes a serious injury, avoid unnecessary and expensive litigation, and will help prevent individuals from attempting to exploit the system with payouts that are not aligned with the severity of their injuries, pushing everyone else's rates up.

## **Ensuring Consumers, Not Insurance Companies, Benefit from Savings**

Since the 1970s, DFS has maintained the Excess Profit Law as a critical consumer protection against auto insurers making excess profits on the backs of consumers. This law acts as a "circuit breaker" by requiring auto insurers to return any profit exceeding a certain threshold directly to policyholders. While carriers have recently operated at a net loss, reforms to the auto insurance law as proposed above would be expected to generate significant operational savings for the industry.

To ensure that savings as a result of the Governor's proposals are passed on to New Yorker policyholders as appropriate, if these reforms are enacted Governor Hochul will direct DFS to re-examine the Excess Profit Law and in particular the current threshold trigger, ensuring consumers are prioritized.

## **Increasing Transparency for Policyholders in the Auto Insurance Market**

Too often, auto insurance rates for policyholders rise without explanation or relation to any identifiable change in context. In a time of high rates, New Yorkers deserve to understand when and why their insurance premiums go up. The Governor will increase transparency by requiring insurers to notify policyholders about rate changes, explain why the changes are happening, and offer additional context upon written request.

Going forward, DFS will determine an appropriate benchmark for the level of policy increase that will trigger insurance companies to have to provide this information automatically by sending a change notice at least 20 days before renewal.

## **Improving Incentives to Drive Safely**

While guarding against bad actors gaming the system, insurance companies should also seek opportunities to reward drivers who play by the rules and keep themselves and others safe. Governor Hochul will seek to reduce insurance costs by enlisting drivers as partners in her efforts to make our roads safer, leveraging technology to reduce insurance rates.

Governor Hochul will require insurance companies to offer discounts on insurance rates when drivers opt into programs that have been shown to reduce the incidents of unsafe and expensive accidents. Under the Governor's proposed reforms, New York drivers who opt into programs that utilize devices, cameras, or smartphone apps to monitor driving behavior will be eligible for discounted personalized rates, with safer drivers offered lower premiums.

All such programs will have to conform with strict privacy and data governance standards, alongside consumer education and transparency requirements. This initiative will help put safer drivers on the road while lowering premiums across the board.

## ***Tackling Rising Home Insurance Costs***

Homeowners and housing providers across the state are contending with escalating home insurance premiums and shrinking options for coverage, which threaten the affordability of New York's single and multi-family homes. While single family home insurance rates in New York are on average lower than many other states, thanks to New York's tightly regulated market, year over year increases in insurance rates still threaten to sap money from families' pocketbooks and make multi-family housing less and less affordable for homeowners and renters.

For New York's rent regulated building stock—which includes over one million units of housing—insurance is one of the fastest growing operating expenses over the last five years. Higher insurance costs are also one of the primary drivers of rent and cooperator's carrying charge increases in affordable housing across the state, particularly among Mitchell-Lama properties. With the aim of addressing home insurance costs, Governor Hochul will offer a multifaceted approach to help drive transparent and more affordable rates.

## **Tracking Home Insurer Profitability**

As an industry, home insurance carriers in New York have reaped steady profits over the past few years. To ensure that the rates New Yorkers pay are in line with carriers' risks, Governor Hochul will create a first-in-the-nation check on home insurer profitability, increasing transparency of potentially excessive profits. Carriers with more than two consecutive years of outsized profit margins will be required to either lower their rates or submit a justification of why those high rates should continue, subject to review by DFS. The benchmark, which will be informed by public comment, will help control excessive profits while keeping coverage affordable and available.

## **Increasing Property Insurance Transparency**

New York regulators have insight into the commercial property insurance market broadly, but less visibility into data relating to multi-family housing. That makes it difficult for the State to analyze

market trends, identify volatility, or develop targeted approaches that increase affordability in a segment of the insurance market that is seeing exploding costs, and that covers essential low-cost housing options for New Yorkers.

To gain valuable transparency, the Governor will require commercial property insurers to report core data metrics annually regarding their multi-family housing businesses, including claims, premiums, and rates. Templates and technical definitions will be developed administratively to make sure data is uniform and comprehensive without being overly burdensome to report. These reports will be made public, providing property owners, researchers, and policymakers with visibility into who writes this insurance, what the trends are in premiums, and how profitability changes year over year.

## **Expanding Automatic Discounts for Homeowners**

In order to help New Yorkers take control of costs by reducing risk, New York State encourages (and in some cases requires) insurers to offer discounts to homeowners who make safety and weatherproofing upgrades like installing storm shutters and smoke alarms. Governor Hochul will expand these discounts, requiring insurers to offer reductions for upgrades such as fire resiliency solutions (e.g., smoke detectors, sprinkler systems), theft prevention products (e.g., security systems, burglar alarms), water damage prevention tools (e.g., smart water monitors, automatic shutoff devices), and roof improvements (e.g., high-wind-rated shingles, roof-to-wall connections).

Every carrier will be required to offer at least one discount in each category to be determined by DFS, as well as additional discounts for homes that meet specific resiliency standards. Insurers will have to regularly inform their policyholders about these discounts, as well as publish annual summaries of available discounts and utilization rates so New Yorkers can compare discounts across insurers on demand.

## **Expanding Automatic Discounts for Commercial Multifamily Properties**

Alongside discounts to individual homeowners, the Governor will expand automatic discounts for risk reduction measures to commercial policyholders operating multifamily homes, such as affordable housing providers. Eligible categories will be similar to those for homeowners, with

upgrades such as pressure-rated gutters and downspouts, fire suppression canisters over stoves, and roof-mounted equipment designed for high wind to be considered for automatic discounts. As with homeowners insurance, the Governor will require insurers to offer discounts across covered categories, regularly inform policyholders about available discounts, and share data that give property owners the ability to comparison shop.

## **Increasing Transparency for Policyholders in the Home Insurance Market**

As in the auto insurance context, home insurance policyholders often face significantly rising rates without any explanation. Insurers should have to explain to New Yorkers when and why their insurance premiums go up. As in the auto insurance market, the Governor will increase transparency by requiring insurers to notify policyholders about rate changes, explain why the changes are happening, and offer additional context upon written request. Parallel to the auto insurance context, going forward DFS will determine an appropriate benchmark for the level of policy increase that will trigger insurance companies to have to provide this information automatically by sending a change notice at least 20 days before renewal.

## **Convening Stakeholders to Bring Down Home and Property Insurance Costs**

Leaving no stone unturned to ensure lower home and property insurance costs, the Governor will convene stakeholders and experts from the affordable housing, real estate and insurance industries to evaluate and propose short- and long-term solutions to reduce costs and increase affordability across the board.

## *Protecting Renters and Rent-Stabilized Housing*

### **Enhancing Penalties to Protect Rent-Regulated Tenants from Pervasive Harassment**

Unscrupulous landlords use a variety of unethical ways to drive out lawful rent-regulated tenants, including pressuring them to move out or failing to make repairs. Even though such harassment is illegal under current law, it can be difficult to hold landlords who harass tenants across multiple buildings fully accountable for their actions. The worst offenders should face the stiffest penalties to reflect the degree of their violations.

Governor Hochul will build upon her actions to protect vulnerable tenants by proposing aggravated criminal penalties for landlords who engage in systematic harassment of rent-regulated tenants across multiple buildings, as well as repeat serious offenders under existing anti-harassment laws. In doing so, the Governor will strengthen protections for rent-regulated tenants and reinforce the clear message that forcing families out of their homes is a crime.

### **Reforming J-51 to Preserve More Rent-Regulated Housing**

First created in the 1950s, New York City's J-51 tax incentives have helped incentivize major repairs and upgrades for apartment buildings in exchange for becoming or staying rent-regulated, preserving affordability and making sure buildings are kept habitable. However, J-51 in its current form has faced administrative challenges that have reduced uptake of this vital program.

Governor Hochul will propose an overhauled J-51 incentive that can better support capital repairs for New York City's rent-stabilized housing stock, including streamlining the process. These changes will ensure that the program is modernized and facilitates necessary building upgrades that benefit tenants. In updating J-51, she will make sure key elements of New York's housing stock remain safe, sustainable, and affordable for working-class families who call these buildings home.

## **Expanding a Critical Rent Freeze Program for Seniors and People with Disabilities**

Seniors and people with disabilities benefit from crucial programs that freeze rents for tenants of rent stabilized apartments and Mitchell-Lama affordable housing. The Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE), which are available in New York City (with similar programs in Westchester, Nassau, and Suffolk counties), use property tax credits to offset rent increases for seniors and people with disabilities to freeze their rent.

Income limits for these rent freeze programs have not been updated since 2014, even though the cost of living has risen dramatically. To ensure that housing remains affordable for both seniors and New Yorkers with disabilities who are living in regulated housing, Governor Hochul will increase the income eligibility limits for the programs from \$50,000 to \$75,000 in New York City, with the same options being available at local-opt in outside the City. These crucial changes have the power to prevent evictions and protect the most vulnerable New Yorkers from runaway rent increases.

## ***Tackling Utility Costs***

### **Improving Fairness for Ratepayers Through Affordable Utilities Omnibus Legislation**

New Yorkers deserve reliable energy at a price they can afford, and deserve to know their utilities are putting them first every day. Governor Hochul is proposing a sweeping set of reforms to modernize the Public Service Law, demanding strict fiscal discipline from utilities and empowering the State to fight more effectively for lower bills. Her proposal will protect consumers by:

- Tying executive pay to affordability: The Governor is putting ratepayers first, and requiring all utilities to publicly disclose how CEO salaries compare to the average worker's pay, and benchmarking executive compensation against customer affordability benchmarks. CEOs shouldn't be reaping outsized benefits while ratepayers are struggling to make ends meet.

- Eliminating gold-plated rate cases: When requesting rate increases, utilities will be required to present a budget-constrained option that keeps their operating and capital costs below the rate of inflation. This exercise will require utilities to prioritize efficiency and affordability and prove why any spending is truly necessary before asking customers to foot the bill.
- Removing hidden fees: Ratepayers should only pay for energy services—period. The Governor is directing DPS to review utility bills to ensure customers never foot the bill for inappropriate utility spending, including corporate advertising, fines, and certain legal fees.

## **Revitalizing EmPower+ to Upgrade Homes**

New York is home to the nation’s oldest building stock, with the median home having been built 63 years ago. As a result, the cost of upgrading a home to 21st century energy efficiency and sustainability standards, which ultimately saves consumers money and saves New York energy, can be prohibitively expensive.

Since its launch in 2023, Governor Hochul’s EmPower+ program has helped nearly 42,000 low- and moderate-income households across the state finance energy improvements, saving families about \$600 per year on their utility bills, slashing emissions, and making homes more comfortable for families. In 2026, Governor Hochul will invest an additional \$50 million into the EmPower+ program, making sure an estimated 10,000 additional households are able to access the free assessments, low-cost direct installs, and targeted upgrades that keep homes comfortable and safe—all while generating jobs and opportunities for local contractors.

## **Excelsior Power: Cheaper Utility Bills for a More Flexible and Affordable Grid**

As energy demand grows, New York’s electric grid must become more flexible to control costs and maintain reliability—and to ensure the State doesn’t overbuild expensive infrastructure at a cost to New York ratepayers. New technologies such as smart thermostats allow utilities to strategically deploy or conserve energy when the grid needs it the most, effectively maintaining comfort, lowering energy bills, and maintaining energy reliability.

Governor Hochul is proposing a two for one: to put money back in the pockets of consumers who choose to use these technologies, while also improving grid reliability and bringing down long-term costs for all New Yorkers. Governor Hochul will advance Excelsior Power, which will provide consumers who utilize smart thermostats and other similar technologies \$25 off their utility bill per month in the first year, well over the average monthly utility cost for consumers in New York State. This will be in addition to any savings the consumer receives through reduced energy usage thanks to the technology.

In addition to providing a discount to consumers, by harnessing grid flexibility tools such as demand response and smart technologies, the State can avoid hundreds of millions of dollars in system costs each year while reducing the need for costly upgrades and backup power plants – averting costs that will otherwise be shouldered by rate payers. To take full advantage of these benefits, DPS will launch a statewide platform to aggregate this technology, ensuring customers can easily enroll and increasing uptake. As these programs scale statewide, grid flexibility is expected to deliver billions of dollars in long-term savings, reducing utility bills and strengthening reliability for households and businesses across the state.

## **Increasing Uptake of Energy Assistance Programs**

New York State invests more than \$1 billion annually in programs to help families lower their energy bills, such as the Energy Affordability Program (EAP), EmPower+, and the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). These programs reduce costs through cash assistance, monthly discounts, and weatherization and efficiency upgrades that reduce energy usage and costs.

Despite these benefits, these programs are not being fully utilized by qualifying ratepayers; for example, it is estimated that only half of income-eligible households utilize the EAP. Further, the delivery of bill financial assistance and weatherization programs can be better aligned to help reduce energy usage and associated bills for those households with the greatest energy burden.

To make sure these critical programs are implemented in a complementary manner and to increase awareness and access for vulnerable New Yorkers, the Governor will streamline planning and administration of these programs to increase the impact of public funds targeting energy burden reductions and make these programs simpler to access. She will also improve utilization by launching a centralized outreach campaign to reach as many New Yorkers as possible.

## **Requiring Data Centers to Pay Their Fair Share and Streamlining Interconnections for Job-Creating Businesses**

Unlike other sectors, data centers consume massive amounts of finite resources and place an unprecedented strain on the electric grid—all without creating many jobs in the process. This drives up the state’s need for energy and increases costs for ratepayers. As energy demand surges across the state, New York State will advance a new initiative with a dual mandate: provide greater certainty and predictability for businesses seeking to invest in New York while ensuring that data centers pay their fair share.

Governor Hochul is taking action to ensure every-day New Yorkers do not subsidize the extremely energy-intensive data center industry. To stop planning uncertainty caused by “phantom loads” and prevent rising costs for every-day consumers, the State will enforce a simple standard: these industries must pay more; if they do not, they must supply their own energy.

To attract responsible new businesses, give them the certainty they need to invest in New York, and protect New York ratepayers, Governor Hochul will tap the Department of Public Service (DPS) to launch a new initiative, Energize NY Development. Its goal will be modernizing how large energy users connect to the grid, making it faster and more predictable, but with strict conditions to protect ratepayers. This effort will streamline interconnection rules and improve transparency around grid upgrades, while explicitly requiring that projects driving exceptional demand without exceptional job creation or other benefits cover the costs they create —through charges or supplying their own power.

By accelerating responsible development and requiring data centers to shoulder their own burden, Energize NY Development will support job creation, industry growth, and economic investment across the state while sparing ratepayers additional pressure on utility bills.

## **Protecting Tenants from Unfair Utility Shutoffs**

Every year, thousands of New Yorkers living in multi-family homes risk losing their heat, water, or electricity when landlords don’t pay utility bills for those buildings. Currently, if a landlord’s failure to pay its utility bill results in a utility shutoff, tenants have few ways of fighting these shutoffs, even when they happen due to no fault of the tenants.

To protect tenants from utility shutoffs in these cases, Governor Hochul will introduce legislation that will allow property liens to be utilized to hold landlords accountable. In doing so, she will make sure families keep their essential services and aren't held responsible for their landlords' failure to pay their debts.

## **Mitigating Energy Cost Burden**

To ensure New Yorkers are not overwhelmed by high utility costs, the Public Service Commission (PSC) has established an affordability target that utility bills should not exceed six percent of household income. If a customer's costs go above that level, the PSC has created the Energy Assistance Program (EAP), which any eligible New Yorker can access to bring down their costs.

In addition to other actions taken to bring down the cost of energy for all New Yorkers and to ensure our agencies are tracking cost increases as they happen, Governor Hochul will introduce legislation that will require utilities to create and report on an affordability index, accurately showing the energy burden on customers throughout their service territory. She will also require the Department of Public Service to report on utility affordability by utility, benchmark against data from other states, and make an annual affordability presentation to PSC.

This won't be just a new report. If the PSC finds that any utility in New York is failing to protect energy affordability, this new legislation will empower the Commission to install an independent Affordability Monitor inside the utility to address the issue. The Affordability Monitor will have full access to management meetings, books, and records to review utility operations and expenditures to help ensure efficient spending and report opportunities for cost savings to PSC.

## **Modernizing Utility Regulation to Protect Consumers**

Rising utility bills are placing real pressure on household budgets. The current process of utility rate setting is increasingly complex, compressed, and difficult for the public to understand or meaningfully engage with in an impactful way.

Governor Hochul will advance reforms to modernize how these rate cases are reviewed and

resolved, giving regulators more time and flexibility to evaluate utility proposals to ensure they are as protective of consumers as possible, encourage good-faith negotiations, and reduce the frequency of disruptive rate increases. These changes will strengthen transparency and accountability in utility regulation, ensure decisions are grounded in a full public record, and shift the system away from rushed outcomes that drive instability for ratepayers. By improving how rate cases are conducted, New York will protect consumers, promote fair outcomes, and put affordability at the center of utility oversight.

## *Helping Put Food on the Table*

### **Investing in Food Banks and Pantries**

The recent federal government shutdown reminded the nation of how precarious our nutrition safety net is and how many New Yorkers contend with food instability. During the shutdown, Governor Hochul rushed an additional \$65 million toward food assistance programs that delivered meals to tens of thousands of New Yorkers in their hour of need.

Governor Hochul is now announcing another additional investment in the Department of Health (DOH)'s Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP). This investment will help food banks keep the lights on and reach more New Yorkers in need by supporting a network of about 2,700 food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters participating in the program. New resources will help food banks and pantries strengthen and expand operations, allowing them to reach more people with healthier options.

### **Investing in New York PLATES**

Food banks and pantries need more than just food to operate effectively. They also need modern facilities, industrial equipment like refrigerators, and vehicles to keep operations running smoothly and deliver food. In addition to increased HPNAP funding, the Governor will establish New York PLATES (Providing Local Access to Essential Sustenance), a statewide competitive grant program

for eligible food pantries across New York's 10 regional food bank territories. NY PLATES grants will fund capital projects, including construction to expand space and upgrade infrastructure, property acquisition, and equipment purchases such as coolers, freezers and food transport vehicles. These investments will increase the capacity of these critical organizations and enable food pantries to safely store, transport and distribute food to more families.

## **Slashing Food Benefits Theft with Modern EBT Cards**

Theft of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits is an epidemic across the United States, with hundreds of millions illegally stolen from families' accounts nationwide. One of the major ways criminals steal funds is by "card skimming," using illegal devices to copy personal account information when people swipe their EBT cards.

Governor Hochul will protect millions of New Yorkers from this predatory behavior by upgrading New York's EBT cards, leveraging secure chip-based technology that makes cards virtually impervious to mass skimming. Doing so will shut down the skimming pipeline that drains critically important SNAP funds, causing needless stress and burden for families, and enable New York State and our social services districts to confront this pressing issue. While the federal administration is trying to strip SNAP benefits from as many New Yorkers as possible, this action will help safeguard the SNAP dollars that New Yorkers depend on to feed their families.

## **Promoting SNAP to Students and Families**

New York leads the nation in implementing universal free school meals, but not all families know that food benefits can help support meals at home, too.

No New York family should go hungry because they don't know where to turn for help. Governor Hochul will require all schools that participate in the State's universal free meals program to link to OTDA's MyBenefits portal, creating a direct link between trusted school websites and SNAP enrollment. By integrating food assistance into the daily digital life of our school communities, she will make it easier than ever for families to access the support they're entitled to.

## **Expanding Free Summer Meal Sites**

For thousands of New York children, summer is the hungriest time of the year. During the pandemic, emergency federal measures ensured that school-based meals continued through the summer months, but as mandates expire, local programs are at risk of going dark.

Governor Hochul will work with local communities to determine barriers that prevent them from continuing free meal programs and identify ways to overcome them. In exploring how to close “the summer gap,” she will help make sure New York’s children have access to healthy meals 365 days a year.

## **Supporting Rural Summer Meals**

Counties officially designated as rural by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) are entitled to summer food services like home delivery and bulk “grab-and-go” pickups, but many eligible communities have not yet implemented these innovations. Governor Hochul will help close these gaps by partnering with nonprofits that offer technical support and grants to summer meal providers in these communities to help with startup costs and implementation. By scaling this program, she will make sure more healthy meals get to the front doors of New York’s families.

## **Promoting Summer EBT Across Agencies**

Summer EBT programs deliver approximately \$200 million in funds to over 1.5 million children across the State of New York. To ensure every federal dollar is put to work for New York’s families, Governor Hochul will direct the Office of Customer Experience to facilitate a statewide Summer EBT awareness campaign. The campaign will break down agency silos, coordinate messaging, and identify resources and opportunities that help meet families where they are and boost investment in local communities.

## Chapter 2: Keeping New Yorkers Safe

Governor Hochul has made public safety her top priority, committing over three billion dollars to initiatives that are producing results statewide. During her time in office, Governor Hochul strengthened New York's bail, discovery, and gun laws, invested record-level funding to support state and local law enforcement efforts, and secured funding to drive down gun violence, subway crime and pandemic-era surges in motor vehicle thefts, retail thefts, and other larcenies.

These investments and policies have contributed to dramatic declines in crime since the beginning of her administration and in the past year. New York State is now one of the safest large states in the country, with the lowest homicide rate of the top 10 most populous states and the third lowest firearm mortality rate in the country.

In 2025, shootings in New York fell to the lowest level in recorded history, both statewide and across New York City. Statewide, major crime is down eight percent in 2025 from 2024; shooting incidents with injury fell to their lowest level on record and were down nearly 60 percent from 2021. New York State also saw decreases reported in every single crime category in 2025 when compared to 2024, with double-digit declines in murder, robbery, burglary and motor vehicle theft; New York City has the second lowest homicide rate of the 10 largest cities. This hard-won progress is a result of Governor Hochul's singular focus on public safety, including having:

- Signed landmark gun safety laws strengthening New York's Red Flag law, increasing the protections of the background check system, tightening restrictions on concealed carry weapons, and cracking down on illegal firearms.
- Overseen a 60 percent decline in shooting incidents with injury in communities participating in the State's Gun Involved Violence Elimination initiative, with shooting incidents reaching the lowest level on record, and taken action that resulted in the removal of more than 10,000 illegal guns from New York streets.
- Delivered historic subway safety investments, driving down transit crime below pre-pandemic levels and to the second-lowest level in recorded history.

- Strengthened New York’s bail and discovery laws to keep dangerous criminals off our streets while better protecting victims.
- Taken decisive action against retail theft, expanding worker protections, adding new criminal charges that target organized retail theft rings, and providing security funding for small businesses; as of December 2025, retail theft is down 14 percent year over year in New York City.
- Responded to the rise in hate crimes by expanding hate crime-eligible offenses and securing funding to protect at-risk sites.

Together, these efforts reflect Governor Hochul’s vision of a safer, stronger, and more equitable state for all New Yorkers, and she won’t back down from advancing an agenda for 2026 and beyond that seeks every opportunity to drive down crime and protect New Yorkers.

## ***Stopping Illegal Homegrown Guns***

### **Cracking Down on 3D-Printed Firearms**

Governor Hochul passed the strongest gun laws in the nation and made record investments in gun violence prevention, resulting in New York having the fewest shooting incidents statewide in recorded history in 2025. However, New York faces an emerging threat along with the rest of the nation—the proliferation of 3D-printed firearms and component parts. As 3D printers become more commonplace, so too have online gun blueprints—downloadable instructions that facilitate the manufacture of illegal, untraceable, easy-to-produce weapons.

Governor Hochul is taking a nation-leading stand to address this threat. She will crack down on illegal 3D-printed firearms by advancing first-in-the-nation legislation that will require minimum safety standards for 3D printers sold in New York include that these printers be equipped with basic technology that prevents the unlicensed, illegal production of lethal firearms and firearm parts.

Legislation will task the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) with leading a task force of experts to recommend regulations that will ensure New Yorkers are protected from these dangerous DIY weapons. Following the implementation of the resulting regulations, the

legislation will allow for recourse against any actor who sells a 3D printer in New York without equipping it with such technology.

To stem the unchecked distribution of digital blueprints that allow printers like those in middle school classrooms and private homes to churn out firearms, the Governor will advance legislation criminalizing the unlawful possession, sale, or distribution of blueprints that allow the printing of illegal guns and gun parts. The legislation will also add criminal penalties for the manufacture of 3D-printed firearms. Additionally, the Governor will direct the New York State Police (NYSP) to track both illegal 3D-printed firearms and sources of illegal design files, partnering with other law enforcement agencies to develop targeted interventions.

## **Taking Aim at DIY Machine Guns**

Machine guns are illegal in every state and New York State's ban on assault and semi-automatic assault weapons has saved countless lives. Manufacturers should not be allowed to sell pistols that can be turned into fully automatic weapons—which can fire at a rate of up to 1,200 rounds per minute—with a tiny “switch” that can be easily purchased online or 3D-printed. However, certain firearm designs make it particularly easy to do just that, converting the weapon into a fully automatic machine gun that allows the shooter to spray bullets with a single pull of the trigger. Even though pistol converters are already illegal at the state and federal levels, these devices can be purchased illegally or 3D-printed at home, then installed in minutes.

Last year, Governor Hochul signed legislation that requires manufacturers to take reasonable steps to ensure that their firearms are not easily convertible into machine guns. This year, she will build upon that effort and take further action to protect New Yorkers by requiring that all pistols sold in the state to private citizens be designed in a way that ensures they cannot quickly and easily be turned into DIY machine guns.

## *Protecting Our Neighbors' Rights*

### **Establishing a Right to Sue Federal Officers for Constitutional Violations**

With unprecedented escalations in aggressive federal immigration enforcement, communities across the United States are reeling from heavy-handed tactics that have been alleged to trample on constitutional rights.

To protect communities across the state and ensure accountability when constitutional rights are violated, Governor Hochul will advance legislation that gives New Yorkers a clear path to seek justice. The proposal authorizes individuals to bring state-level civil actions against federal officers who violate New Yorkers' U.S. constitutional rights, consistent with the same legal standards that already exist elsewhere in the law. Notably, state and local officers already are subject to these standards, including qualified immunity that protects law enforcement officers who act within the bounds of clearly established law. This legislation would ensure accountability for federal officers under those standards. By aligning state law with existing federal civil rights frameworks, this proposal reinforces constitutional protections and provides New Yorkers with a meaningful legal recourse when federal authority is unconstitutionally abused in New York.

### **Protecting New Yorkers in Sensitive Locations**

For decades, federal policy under both parties has limited warrantless civil immigration enforcement in sensitive locations such as schools, hospitals, and houses of worship. Recent federal changes have rolled back these protections, disrupting public safety, school communities, access to care, and trust in critical institutions.

New Yorkers should be able to attend school, access child care, seek medical care, and worship in peace. Governor Hochul will propose legislation to ensure sensitive locations can be protected from civil immigration enforcement without a judicial warrant. This measure will help provide stability for children and families in essential community spaces.

## **Protecting Safe Access to Worship and Healthcare**

New Yorkers deserve to worship and seek medical care in a manner that is safe and free from harassment or intimidation. Yet, in New York and across the nation, we see alarming incidents of interference—including venomous and hate-fueled demonstrations—when people attempt to exercise these rights. To ensure these fundamental freedoms, Governor Hochul is advancing legislation to establish buffer zones around houses of worship and healthcare facilities. Taking lessons learned from approaches adopted in other jurisdictions, these buffer zones will protect individuals from harassment and obstruction while preserving the right to lawful expression. This proposal reflects New York's commitment to safeguarding public safety, religious freedom, and access to care, while upholding constitutional values.

## ***Safeguarding Our Roads***

### **Launching the Next Phase of the Autonomous Vehicle Pilot Program**

Autonomous vehicle technology is advancing quickly, and New York has an opportunity to act to ensure its safe and responsible use on our roads. To that end, Governor Hochul will introduce legislation to advance the next phase of New York State's autonomous vehicle (AV) pilot program by allowing for the limited deployment of commercial for-hire autonomous passenger vehicles outside New York City. AV companies interested in piloting services that expand and improve mobility options for communities will be required to submit applications that demonstrate local support for AV deployment and adherence to the highest possible safety standards.

This initiative builds on years of successful testing demonstrations across the state and reflects growing evidence that autonomous vehicles can improve road safety and transportation options when introduced thoughtfully. By pairing innovation with strong oversight and planning by State agencies including the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), Department of Transportation (DOT), and New York State Police (NYSP), New York will help shape the future of transportation while keeping public safety front and center.

## **Stopping New York City's Super Speeders through Intelligent Speed Assistance**

Speed is one of the leading causes of serious injury and death on New York City streets, with repeat offenders posing an outsized risk to pedestrians, cyclists, and families. Governor Hochul will introduce legislation to authorize New York City to pilot a program to require the installation of Intelligent Speed Assistance systems for drivers with a documented pattern of flouting speeding laws and putting New Yorkers at risk. Under this initiative, New York City can require that vehicles driven by persistent speeders be equipped with technology that prevents travel more than a few miles per hour above the posted speed limit. Similar approaches have already reduced excessive speeding in New York City's municipal fleets and are being adopted in other states and internationally.

This pilot will directly target the most dangerous driving behavior, helping prevent tragedies before they happen and making city streets safer for everyone. Based on the results from this pilot initiative, New York will seek to allow interested communities around the state to opt into an Intelligent Speed Assistance program.

## **Ensuring Safety First in Work Zones**

Highway work zones are among the most dangerous places to work in New York, with speeding and distracted driving continuing to put workers and motorists at risk. In addition to work zone incursions resulting in fatal crashes and serious injuries, transportation workers also face increased rates of harassment and assaults as they work to maintain our roadways.

Governor Hochul will strengthen work zone safety by introducing legislation to expand automated speed enforcement to additional roadways and modernizing driver education to reinforce safe behavior in active work zones. The state will also deploy new technologies that immediately warn workers when vehicles enter closed areas. In addition, Governor Hochul will advance stronger legal protections for frontline highway workers to deter assaults and hold offenders accountable. Together, these actions will better protect the people who keep New York's roads safe and reduce preventable injuries and deaths in work zones.

## **Strengthening Motorcycle Licensing Standards for New and Inexperienced Riders**

Motorcycle riders face a significantly higher risk of serious injury or death in traffic crashes, particularly when they lack formal training and on-road experience. While New York State currently offers a voluntary motorcycle safety course, riders can currently obtain a license without completing standardized instruction.

Governor Hochul will strengthen motorcycle licensing standards by requiring all new or first-time motorcycle license applicants to complete an approved rider training course before becoming licensed. This requirement will ensure riders receive consistent instruction on safe operation, defensive riding techniques, and real-world traffic conditions. By setting a clear baseline for training, New York will reduce preventable crashes and help riders build the skills needed to ride safely and responsibly.

## ***Prioritizing Safety on the Subway***

### **Sustaining Record Lows in Subway Crime by Putting Police on Platforms**

2025 concluded with subway crime at its lowest level in 16 years, including 14.4 percent fewer major crimes in the transit system compared to 2019. Transit robberies fell to their lowest levels on record, while gun recoveries reached an all-time high. Subway ridership is up: in 2025, there were almost 1.3 billion trips, up 30% from 2022.

These gains—lower crime and higher ridership—are the result of the hard work of dedicated police officers, made possible by Governor Hochul’s proactive investments in policing and mental health engagement strategies that promote order and public safety throughout the system. To ensure continued progress on subway safety, Governor Hochul will commit an additional \$77 million for enhanced subway patrols in 2026. This funding will support the deployment of NYPD officers across the subway system to target those areas of greatest need and deliver the largest impact on enhancing rider safety.

## **Expanding SCOUT Teams in the Subway System**

New York's subway system continues to serve as a refuge for some of the state's most vulnerable individuals, including people experiencing homelessness and untreated severe mental illness. The Subway Co-Response Outreach Teams initiative, known as SCOUT, pairs MTA Police officers with clinical staff from the NYC Department of Homeless Services to engage individuals in crisis and connect them to care, treatment, or shelter. Over the life of the program, SCOUT removals have led to approximately 7,500 nights of inpatient hospital care, with virtually no law enforcement outcomes.

Building on the success of the current teams, which have already helped hundreds of people access psychiatric care, medical services, and shelter, Governor Hochul will expand SCOUT teams by 50 percent from 10 to 15, to reach more locations and operate with greater flexibility across the system. This expansion will allow teams to respond more quickly to individuals in acute distress and focus resources where needs are greatest. By strengthening this proven partnership, New York will improve safety on the subway while ensuring people in crisis receive timely, appropriate care rather than being left without support.

## **Protecting Riders with Platform Edge Barriers**

Keeping riders safe on subway platforms is one of the most direct ways to improve every-day transit safety. Governor Hochul will expand the installation of platform edge barriers to 85 additional subway stations in 2026, building on recent progress to reduce the risk of falls onto the tracks. These barriers provide a visible, physical safety improvement, which riders experience immediately while waiting for trains. 115 stations have already been upgraded using a streamlined, in-house approach that allows installations to move quickly and efficiently. By continuing to scale this proven approach, the State will make subway stations safer, calmer, and more secure for millions of daily riders.

## *Combating Crime and Ensuring Justice*

### **Expanding Crime Analysis Centers Statewide**

New York's Crime Analysis Center network has become a critical tool in the State's public safety strategy, supporting investigations, strengthening prosecutions, and improving coordination across law enforcement agencies. As crime increasingly crosses jurisdictional boundaries, there is growing demand for enhanced analytic capacity in regions with high population density and complex regional activity. New York's Crime Analysis Centers epitomize the Governor's data-driven approach to supporting policing by convening more than 350 agencies on the federal, state and local levels to confront our most intractable challenges head on.

To reach complete statewide coverage, Governor Hochul will expand the Crime Analysis Center network by establishing a new center in Westchester County. This center will provide local and regional law enforcement with real-time crime analysis, investigative support, and stronger information sharing with neighboring counties and state partners. By extending the reach of this proven model into a key regional corridor, New York will continue to strengthen public safety and support effective, data-driven policing statewide.

### **Solving Crimes by Investing in Crime Labs**

Timely and reliable forensic analysis is critical to delivering justice for victims and holding offenders accountable, yet many of New York's crime laboratories are operating with outdated equipment and long-standing staffing constraints. Governor Hochul will invest in modernizing the state's crime labs to reduce backlogs, speed up case processing, and improve the quality and consistency of forensic evidence. This initiative will support upgrades to DNA and drug analysis technology, expand forensic staffing, and strengthen statewide standards through accreditation and proficiency testing. By improving the speed and reliability of forensic work, the State will help ensure cases move forward efficiently and that survivors are not left waiting years for resolution.

## **Improving Police Training Academies**

New York's police officers are trained through a decentralized system of local academies that vary widely in curriculum, duration, and instructional quality. This inconsistency means officers across the state do not receive the same level of preparation, despite serving communities with similar expectations for professionalism, safety, and accountability. Governor Hochul will strengthen police training by developing an accreditation program that local agencies can opt into to ensure that all agencies have equal access to standardized information around best practices, which will help provide high-quality instruction, particularly for smaller and underserved departments.

## **Supporting State Police after Critical Incidents**

Our first responders experience higher levels of mental health challenges than most other professions. As part of Governor Hochul's commitment to taking care of law enforcement, addressing these challenges has been a priority. New York State Troopers carry out one of the most demanding public safety missions in the nation and place themselves in harm's way to keep New Yorkers safe.

To support both officer well-being and public safety, the Governor will advance legislation to enhance and codify paid critical incident leave for State Police members involved in justified qualifying uses of force. This proposal ensures troopers have the time and support needed to recover, fully cooperate with investigations, and safely return to duty—reinforcing accountability, professionalism, and the safety of the communities they serve.

## **Extending Orders of Protection**

When defendants fail to appear in court, orders of protection—which can include stay-away provisions, no-contact requirements, and firearm surrender obligations—lose their enforceability at the very moments victims are most at risk. This loophole allows individuals to evade the consequences of court-ordered protections simply by failing to return to court, undermining victim safety and accountability.

Governor Hochul will close this loophole by requiring courts to automatically extend an order of protection when a defendant does not return to court. Judges will also be required to clearly notify defendants in advance that the order will remain in effect if they fail to appear. By strengthening continuity and accountability, the State will better protect victims and prevent dangerous gaps in enforcement.

## **Supporting At-Risk and Survivor-Led Victim Assistance Programs**

Many of New York's more than 250 Victim Assistance Programs provide services that supplement those offered directly by the Office of Victim Services (OVS), yet some smaller or survivor-led organizations lack the administrative capacity to manage financial stress. When these programs close, service gaps can emerge quickly in affected communities.

Governor Hochul will announce a new technical assistance initiative administered by OVS to support fiscally at-risk and survivor-led programs. Participating organizations will be able to request targeted assistance, including financial management support, compliance guidance, and organizational planning. This effort will help stabilize providers, enhance long-term sustainability, and increase access to victim services statewide.

## **Streamlining and Promoting Access to Victim Compensation**

For crime victims, financial barriers stemming from victimization can worsen trauma and delay recovery, yet many New Yorkers are unaware that victim compensation is available or struggle to navigate the claims process. Governor Hochul will modernize New York's victim compensation system by launching a new, trauma-informed claims platform that is easier to access, easier to use, and more responsive to victims' needs. The State will also promote awareness of victim compensation and related services, so survivors know help is available when they need it most, regardless of whether they have reported the crime to law enforcement. Together, these improvements will help victims access financial support more quickly, reduce stress during recovery, and strengthen trust in the services designed to support them.

## **Reforming Sexual Offense Evidence Collection Kit Procedures**

Survivors of sexual assault deserve a system that prioritizes their dignity, autonomy, and long-term well-being. Governor Hochul will advance legislation to modernize sexual offense evidence collection kit procedures, so survivors have more time, more control, and more options when deciding how to move forward. This proposal will extend sexual offense evidence collection kit retention periods for survivors assaulted as children, allow survivors to report kits anonymously without entering the criminal justice process, and ensure that evidence cannot be destroyed without a survivor's consent. It will also give certain minors with the capacity to consent more authority over decisions related to their own evidence collection kits.

These proposals complement landmark legislation signed by the Governor that established and expanded a Statewide Sexual Offense Kit Tracking System, designed to support survivors and achieve justice. Together, these changes will reduce re-traumatization, expand access to survivor services, and ensure the system responds to survivors on their terms, not on an arbitrary timeline.

## **Streamlining Justice by Reducing Costs and Delays in Grand Jury Proceedings**

Of the 22 states that require indictment by a grand jury, New York is the only one that requires a witness to appear in-person to authenticate routine business records before they can be admitted as evidence. This antiquated requirement forces witnesses to travel, often from across the country, just to answer a few basic questions about records that are created in the regular course of business. The result is increased costs for prosecutors, lost productivity for companies, delayed cases, and wasted taxpayer dollars. It also places a disproportionate burden on under-resourced offices, making it harder to pursue certain cases and undermining fairness and public safety.

Governor Hochul will seek legislation to allow routine business records to be swiftly introduced through a sworn affidavit, bringing New York's grand jury procedures in line with modern practice nationwide. As a result, the relevant witnesses, located out of state or very far from the grand jury, will be able to testify without incurring extreme costs for the state or inconvenience for the witnesses. These common-sense reforms will reduce costs, improve fairness, prevent unnecessary

delays, and finally end a uniquely burdensome and outdated process.

## *Improving Emergency and Disaster Response*

### **Enhancing Readiness for Mass Violence Events**

New York has experienced a tragic number of mass violence incidents in recent years, placing intense strain on communities and the organizations that support survivors in the immediate aftermath. While local Victim Assistance Programs are trusted first points of contact, many lack training in disaster mental health, psychological first aid, and coordinated mass casualty response. Governor Hochul will strengthen the state's readiness for mass violence events by directing a statewide training initiative to equip community-based Victim Assistance Programs with the skills needed to respond effectively to large-scale incidents.

The Governor will also improve coordination among state agencies through the Mass Violence Advisory Council by establishing shared response protocols that clarify roles and streamline support. Together, these actions will ensure survivors receive timely, trauma-informed care and that communities are better prepared to respond when tragedy occurs.

### **Strengthening Statewide Urban Search and Rescue Capacity**

As extreme weather events become more frequent and severe, New York communities face growing risks from flooding, structural collapses, and other complex rescue situations. Governor Hochul will strengthen statewide emergency response by establishing a new Urban Search and Rescue capability through a partnership between New York's Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services' (DHSES) Office of Fire Prevention and Control and local first responders. The team will meet the federal Type 1 Urban Search and Rescue standard, meaning it can deploy quickly and sustain large-scale rescue operations during major disasters. This will expand access to advanced rescue capabilities that are currently concentrated in New York City. By building this capacity statewide, New York will improve response times, support local responders, and better protect lives during disasters and emergencies.

## **Partnering with Canada to Strengthen Disaster Response**

New York regularly relies on mutual aid from other states during emergencies, but current agreements do not allow the state to formally access assistance from nearby Canadian provinces, even when those resources are closer and faster to deploy. Governor Hochul will propose legislation authorizing New York to join the Northern Emergency Management Assistance Compact and the International Emergency Assistance Compact, enabling coordinated emergency response with Ontario and Quebec. This will allow New York to request and provide personnel, equipment, and specialized capabilities across the border during disasters. Strengthening cross-border coordination and cooperation will improve response times, expand available resources, and better protect New Yorkers during large-scale emergencies.

## **Developing a Comprehensive Plan for Drones**

As drones become more widespread and technologically advanced, they pose growing risks to safety, critical infrastructure, and the general public. Current laws limit the State's ability to restrict where drones can operate, respond quickly when drones are used maliciously or dangerously, or test and utilize effective counter-drone technologies.

Governor Hochul will advance a comprehensive approach to both prohibit risky drone use and narrowly pilot responsible use of drones as first responders. She will advance legislation and agency actions to further limit where drones may fly (for example, near bridges and other critical infrastructure, schools, and large public gatherings); expand law enforcement authority to respond to credible drone threats; and support safe testing of counter-drone technologies. The proposal will also begin a pilot program within New York State Police to utilize drones as first responders, which will allow officers to assess the reality of a situation before arriving on scene, promoting officer and public safety. Together, these actions will protect communities, infrastructure, and public events from emerging aerial threats, while improving response times and methods in emergencies.

## **Supporting First Responders' Behavioral Health Needs**

First responders protect the health and safety of our families every day; however, this challenging and high-stress work often results in a range of mental health challenges. This workforce is highly impacted by burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety, and may turn to substance use as a means for coping. A recent statewide assessment from DHSES and SUNY New Paltz revealed that more than half of New York's first responders are currently experiencing these issues, yet many remain hesitant to seek care through traditional channels.

The Governor will build on her commitment to supporting New York's first responders by establishing a First Responder Behavioral Health Center of Excellence to serve as a statewide training and technical assistance hub so departments of all sizes can develop peer support programs. By leveraging the trust inherent in peer-to-peer relationships, New York will break down barriers to care and ensure that people who protect our communities have the mental health resources they need to stay safe and healthy on the job.



# Chapter 3: Investing in Critical Infrastructure New Yorkers Need

New York has been a leader in building some of the most iconic infrastructure in the world—from the Brooklyn Bridge to Grand Central Station to the Erie Canal. However, recent decades have seen our ambitions blunted, our skylines growing more static, and our ability to deliver on crucial projects hindered by regulation and inaction.

The consequences of failing to dream expansively about the projects required for a 21st century economy have meant transit delays and road closures leading to longer and unpredictable commutes for millions of New Yorkers. It resulted in a housing crisis caused by an unprecedented shortage of homes across the state, driving up housing costs for New Yorkers. And it has translated into an affordability crisis that has left too many of our nurses, teachers, firefighters, young people, parents, and seniors unable to live in communities of their choice.

When Governor Hochul took office, she vowed to reestablish New York's position as a leader in building world-class infrastructure. Governor Hochul has demonstrated that we can build at scale and with urgency so that New Yorkers get the housing, transportation, water, parks, and other infrastructure they desperately need. Since taking office, Governor Hochul has:

- Invested a record \$25 billion to create or preserve 100,000 affordable homes statewide over five years. Already, 77,000 homes have been completed, putting the Governor ahead of schedule in achieving her goal.
- Launched the nation's first congestion pricing program, which has resulted in less traffic, cleaner air, and safer streets, all while generating over \$500 million to fund mass transit improvements.
- Broken decades of inertia by moving ahead with major infrastructure projects that have been on the drawing board for decades, such as the Interborough Express (IBX), Second Avenue Subway Phase 2, the New Midtown Bus Terminal, the Hudson Tunnel Project, and the I-81 Viaduct Project.

- Fully funded the MTA’s historic 2025-2029 Capital Plan, which commits \$68 billion to modernize and expand the New York City region’s transit system.
- Completed major airport improvement projects across upstate New York, including in Rochester, Binghamton, Syracuse, Sullivan County, Ogdensburg, and Saratoga County.
- Committed an additional \$1 billion to New York City to support affordable housing and secure “City of Yes for Housing Opportunity,” the most impactful pro-housing rezoning in the city’s history, expected to produce more than 80,000 new homes.
- Unlocked \$1.6 billion in state investment for vital improvements for the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), benefitting 123,000 residents; and signed the first of its kind NYCHA Preservation Trust legislation to comprehensively modernize up to 25,000 of its homes.
- Delivered a record \$3.8 billion in the last fiscal year for investments in local water infrastructure, helping ensure access to clean drinking water and bolster flood resilience.
- Invested \$100 million to upgrade and build 30 new community centers across the state, which are expected to benefit nearly 400,000 New Yorkers.
- Advanced projects to improve build new parks, recreational facilities, and pools across New York to complement the Governor’s “Unplug and Play” initiative, including the Jones Beach East Bathhouse which will be completed this year, upgrades and new facilities at Sojourner Truth and Buffalo Harbor State Parks, and restoration of Lake Sebago Beach.

This year, the Governor will build upon this progress, by continuing to make historic investments to tackle the housing shortage and bring down housing costs, invest in major transportation projects to improve commutes for millions of New Yorkers, deliver clean drinking water and the water projects needed to support housing and economic development, and build new parks, community centers, and sports facilities for New Yorkers to get moving and strengthen communities. The Governor is also advancing legislative and administration actions that, in addition to those investments, will make building and serving New Yorkers faster and easier.

## ***Building More Housing***

### **Investing an Additional \$250 Million to Accelerate Affordable Housing**

In 2022, Governor Hochul launched a bold, comprehensive, five-year, \$25 billion Housing Plan to create or preserve 100,000 affordable homes statewide, including 10,000 with supportive services for vulnerable populations, and the electrification of 50,000 homes. This record Housing Plan includes major investments to build new supportive housing, preserve existing multifamily developments, construct new homes for seniors, create new opportunities for first-time homeowners, and improve energy efficiency across the state’s current housing stock. To date, the Plan is ahead of schedule, with 77,000 homes created or preserved.

Building on the Governor’s historic commitments to affordable housing, Governor Hochul will allocate \$250 million in new capital funding to accelerate and expand the development of affordable housing this fiscal year, producing thousands more affordable homes. This infusion of additional capital will help ensure that transformational projects that may otherwise be delayed by years will be sped up to address the housing communities need and deserve today.

### **Embracing Innovative Approaches to Build Homes More Quickly and at Lower Costs**

With access to more affordable “starter homes” becoming increasingly scarce across New York, many young families and older New Yorkers are denied opportunities to find a home of the size and cost that meets their needs. Prefabricated construction techniques have unlocked new approaches to quickly building high-quality homes at lower costs by fabricating components or entire structures in factories, rather than on site. Last year, Governor Hochul launched the MOVE-IN NY program, which harnesses the benefits of prefabricated construction to build homes up to three times faster and at nearly half the cost of comparably sized homes built using traditional on-site construction methods. The program allows those homes to be sold to low- and moderate-income homebuyers at an affordable price point.

This year, the Governor will provide additional funding to support the expansion of the MOVE-IN NY program and continued exploration of innovative emerging factory-built and modular construction technologies. This investment will help New York build new affordable homes more quickly and economically throughout the state and remain a leader in using innovative approaches to homebuilding.

## **Expanding the Number of Land Banks Permitted**

New York's first land banks were established after passage of the New York Land Bank Act in 2011. Land banks have since become essential, helping cities, towns, and villages address vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties consistent with community and economic development goals, while providing critically needed affordable housing opportunities. New York's land bank program started with 10 land banks and has since expanded to 31, growing to one of the most active and effective networks of land banks in the country. These land banks have returned thousands of properties back to productive use and created affordable housing opportunities in communities from Buffalo to Long Island. During Governor Hochul's term, New York State has invested over \$160 million to support community development through land banks.

Despite these successes, current New York State law limits the number of land banks that may be established to 35. To enable more communities to reclaim vacant properties and create more affordable housing, Governor Hochul will propose legislation to increase the cap on the number of land banks that can be established to 45.

## **Creating the Manufactured Homes Park Improvement Revolving Loan Fund**

There are nearly 2,000 manufactured home parks located in New York, many of which are located in rural areas and offer residents an affordable pathway to achieving the dream of homeownership. However, owners of manufactured home parks often lack access to affordable capital to make infrastructure improvements or invest in making manufactured home communities more resilient. Owners that make such investments typically seek to recoup the costs through increased rents, which impacts affordability for the generally low-and-moderate income households who call these parks home.

Governor Hochul will create a new revolving loan fund to support continued investment in this important part of the state's low-cost housing stock and preserve affordability for homeowners. The fund will provide park owners with affordable capital to finance improvements to critical infrastructure including sewer, septic and water systems, utilities, roadways and resiliency upgrades.

## ***Delivering Clean and Safe Water***

New York's water infrastructure is the lifeblood of our public health and the backbone of our economy and our communities. However, our aging systems face a host of challenges due to old infrastructure and emerging contaminants and require necessary upgrades to protect our environment and drinking water sources. Lack of adequate water infrastructure, like sewers, is also preventing necessary housing development and economic growth across the state. Modern sewer systems act as the essential foundation for housing expansion, providing the literal underground capacity needed to build new neighborhoods and revitalize urban centers.

To meet this moment, Governor Hochul is proposing a bold five-year, \$3.75 billion commitment to water infrastructure, with \$750 million in funding per year. This increased investment will ensure substantial funding is available for communities to affordably build the sewers and infrastructure they need to build housing. It will also allow the State to continue to tackle legacy threats like lead service lines and address "forever chemicals" like PFAS, ensuring that New York remains a national leader in protecting our residents and environment, while providing clean, safe drinking water.

This historic funding level will also continue to uplift and support New York's premier water programs, such as the Water Infrastructure Improvement (WIIA) program, the Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) program, and the Lead Infrastructure Forgiveness and Transformation (LIFT) program. These are more than just line items; they are proven vehicles for affordability. Since 2015, WIIA alone has saved ratepayers \$7.2 billion. By continuing and improving these grant programs, the State will continue to make essential local projects affordable for taxpayers.

## **Tapping Into Growth: Expanding Water Resources to Unlock New Housing Development**

Critical economic projects have stalled due to lack of access to water infrastructure. This acts as a barrier to community expansion, housing affordability, and economic development. To unlock New York's full economic potential, including urban hubs across the state, Governor Hochul will launch a new Smart Growth Water Grant Program. This program will focus on sewer and water projects that directly enable the construction of new housing units and the creation of permanent jobs. Further, the program will complement other local water programs and investments, such as Suffolk County's Water Quality Restoration Act. This will also allow New York to build the necessary water and sewer infrastructure needed for fostering economic and housing growth in places like Long Island, while simultaneously protecting groundwater.

## **Addressing Contamination from Landfills to Protect Water Quality**

Clean water, vibrant agriculture, and a healthy environment go hand-in-hand. Currently, due to the lack of treatment for liquid waste from landfills that may contain heavy metals and PFAS, this waste may flow into municipal wastewater treatment plants that are unable to remove these substances. This risks discharging "forever chemicals" and other harmful contaminants into our drinking water. To build upon New York's nation-leading efforts to address emerging contaminants, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) will establish new regulations that instruct landfills to treat leachate for harmful contaminants at the source before discharge; and provide funding for local governments to comply. By treating leachate at the source, we can better protect our environment and our drinking water sources, and save taxpayers millions in future cleanup costs.

## **Getting the Lead Out**

Governor Hochul is committed to ensuring New Yorkers have access to safe, clean drinking water, which includes continuing to invest in removing and replacing lead service lines. By building upon the success of the Governor's LIFT program, the State will move forward with new funding opportunities to support even more communities in the vital work of identifying and replacing lead service lines.

This effort goes beyond just pipes; filter replacements in schools will be reclassified as reimbursable expenses, making them eligible for funding through DEC, helping to provide essential water filters in our schools. These continued investments reflect New York's commitment to protect our neighborhoods and provide peace of mind for families across the state, one glass of water at a time.

## *Upgrading Our Parks*

### **Investing in Rochester's First State Park: High Falls State Park**

Governor Hochul is committed to expanding green spaces across New York State to provide children and families opportunities to be outside, unplug and play, and spend time with loved ones. As part of that goal, Governor Hochul is announcing steps towards the construction of High Falls State Park, which will transform 40 acres of brownfield into Rochester's first state park, and restore public access to this part of the Genesee River for the first time in over a century. The design of the park, which has been informed by robust public engagement, will allow New Yorkers to experience High Falls up close and provide a variety of outdoor spaces to enjoy. The first phase of construction on the park will begin in 2026. The park will be free to access, linked to existing and new trail networks, and connected to the downtown core of the city with public transit.

### **Restoring Riverbank's Role as a Community Hub for Harlem and Beyond**

Denny Farrell Riverbank State Park is a community center in Upper Manhattan serving over four million visitors annually. The park is in urgent need of rehabilitation. Decades of water damage have caused terracotta panels on the facade to detach and fall, creating a serious safety hazard for both visitors and staff. Many of the park's recreational facilities are also in desperate need of upgrades including the amphitheater, playgrounds, basketball courts, tennis courts, restrooms, staircases and elevators. Moreover, because the park's construction predates modern American Disabilities Act (ADA) standards, it is inaccessible for many older New Yorkers and people with disabilities.

Governor Hochul will launch a program to revitalize Denny Farrell Riverbank State Park so that it can

better serve the millions of residents who depend on it. The park will be upgraded through a multi-year, staged facility renewal, first prioritizing emergency infrastructure repairs, and ensuring this affordable, year-round hub for recreation and youth engagement is able to continue its vital mission.

## **Exploring the Niagara Gorge**

Niagara Falls State Park is the most visited state park in New York, welcoming well over nine million visitors per year from around the world and generating significant economic value for the region. To help bring this natural treasure to its full potential, Governor Hochul is launching an effort to expand the footprint of Niagara Falls State Park to include the nearby Whirlpool and Devil's Hole State Parks.

Unifying these three parks into one will extend its reach from the rapids of Riverway to the brink of the falls northward through the gorge trail system—creating a seamless corridor of breathtaking overlooks, historic sites, and world-class hiking opportunities. The realignment will also add nearly two more miles of trails to the park and serve to better connect the attractions along the way including the Aquarium of Niagara and the Underground Railroad Heritage Center. Together, these improvements will improve the experience of millions of visitors, promote longer tourism stays in the area while increasing tourism spending, and showcase the nearby assets and attractions of the local communities.

## ***Strengthening Our Communities***

### **Launching NY Kicks: A World Cup Legacy Investment Fund**

The arrival of the FIFA World Cup 2026 in New York presents an opportunity for the state to translate this historic event into enduring community value; and support our youngest New Yorkers in growing a lifelong love of the sport. As part of the FIFA World Cup festivities across New York, Governor Hochul will launch NY Kicks: A World Cup Legacy Investment Fund to build youth soccer infrastructure in disadvantaged communities across each region in the state that will live

beyond this summer.

Youth sports have been proven to improve mental health and well-being in children and young adults, enabling them to build social skills, confidence, and connections to the local community. Creating community soccer facilities will help ensure that all young people, not just those who play on the school team, feel welcome and invited to use the fields, stay active, make friends, and be outside. This investment builds off of Governor Hochul’s Unplug and Play Initiative, which encourages children and families to put down their devices and engage in outdoor recreation, physical activity, and in-person connection.

NY Kicks will create lasting, accessible soccer infrastructure to meet the growing demand of the world’s most popular sport. Focusing on disadvantaged communities, it will provide capital funding to empower local governments and community-based organizations to build soccer fields and facilities serving young New Yorkers. Recipients will be eligible for operating grants to fund programming, equipment, training and other needs to maximize the impact of new soccer facilities delivered by NY Kicks.

## **Building Community Centers to Foster Connections and Well-Being**

Governor Hochul is committed to building stronger, healthier communities in every corner of New York State. That’s why, last year, she launched Building Recreational Infrastructure for Communities, Kids and Seniors—NY BRICKS. NY BRICKS offers grants to support municipalities and nonprofit organizations across New York State in building or renovating community centers that promote physical health, mental well-being, and community connections for youth and older adults.

In less than a year, Governor Hochul’s NY BRICKS initiative has already resulted in more than 30 awards, totaling \$100 million, that extend to projects in 22 counties across New York State, reflecting the statewide reach and geographic diversity of the program. More than 90 percent of funding awarded will support projects in underserved communities. Together, these centers will benefit nearly 400,000 New Yorkers. Already, communities around the state are planning the youth programming, forming the sports leagues, and calendaring the community theater events that these projects will facilitate.

Building on the success of this program, Governor Hochul will provide a new round of funding dedicated to building and renovating affordable and accessible community spaces where kids can play, families can connect, and seniors can stay active and engaged.

## **Preserving Performing Art Spaces**

New York's live arts scene plays a vital role in the state's economy by attracting tourists, creating vibrant communities, and supporting emerging artists. However, many nonprofit arts organizations rely on rented venues, which limits their ability to plan long-term projects and makes them vulnerable to shifts in real estate markets or increases in rental prices. Nearly 50 arts venues have shuttered in NYC alone since 2020, and the 2010s saw dozens more theaters, music halls, and other live performance spaces close permanently.

These closures rob New York of the economic activity and cultural vibrancy that live performances promote, which is central to New York City's status as the cultural capital of the world and the rebirth of countless communities across the Hudson Valley and Upstate New York as thriving creative hubs. The loss of smaller performance spaces that are deeply ingrained in local arts communities also erodes New York's ability to incubate new plays, bands, and other artistic works, and to sustain a robust creative workforce.

To help secure the long-term future of smaller performance spaces across the state, Governor Hochul is launching a new program: Saving Performing Arts and Cultural Experiences (NY SPACE). This initiative will provide funding to help nonprofit performing arts organizations acquire venues like theatres, concert halls, and other live performance spaces. NY SPACE will serve established nonprofit performing-arts-presenting organizations at risk of losing their venues, by helping them purchase spaces they currently rent or other permanent facilities. This will allow grantees to move to more sustainable operating models and continue to deliver essential arts and cultural programming for generations to come.

## **Improving Infrastructure at County Fairs**

New York's county fairs bring communities together, highlight local specialties and agricultural

traditions, boost local economies, and offer opportunities for youth education and engagement. County fairs are a source of local pride and are important for connecting our communities, providing fun, safe and affordable entertainment including great food, music, and rides. County fairs are also deeply rooted in education and celebrating local agricultural traditions: exhibits and demonstrations on sustainability, crop production, and animal care help educate and engage younger visitors.

To help support county fairs and support venues for kids to “unplug and play,” Governor Hochul will invest in infrastructure improvements at county fairs, and provide support for off-season event capacity. This funding will support projects such as new show arenas, barns and washing facilities for animals in youth competitions; upgrades to bathroom facilities used by youth and their families at the fairgrounds; purchase or installation of hand washing stations outside animal exhibition buildings; and purchase of security equipment like cameras, monitors or barriers.

## *Improving Commutes and Travel*

### **Reimagining Jamaica Station for the Millions of Commuters Who Depend on It**

Jamaica Station is integral to the commutes of millions of New Yorkers, enabling the workers and students in Queens to get to school and jobs, allowing travelers to get to and from Long Island, ensuring travelers from around the world can efficiently and affordably get to JFK Airport, and connecting New Yorkers to world-class sporting and entertainment events. More than 1,000 trains and 200,000 passengers transit Jamaica Station every weekday, making it the fourth busiest commuter rail station in North America—surpassed only by Grand Central Station, Penn Station, and Toronto’s Union Station. Yet Jamaica Station has been left far behind in terms of customer experience and investment; it was last upgraded 23 years ago, when the AirTrain JFK began operation in 2003.

To modernize Jamaica Station into the world-class station experience it deserves to be, Governor Hochul is taking the next step to design a reimagined Jamaica Station. The reimagined Jamaica Station will help create better traffic flow, reduce crowding, and build out a world class station complex providing seamless connection among the LIRR Main Line, NYC Transit, and AirTrain

JFK for the millions of commuters who depend on this station.

## **Advancing the Second Avenue Subway Crosstown Expansion Project to Improve Commutes**

In her 2024 State of the State address, the Governor proposed a bold and innovative solution to enhance the potential of one of the most promising expansion projects in the MTA's service area—extending the Q line west along 125th Street, with three new stops at Lenox Avenue, St. Nicholas Avenue, and culminating at Broadway. Governor Hochul funded a feasibility study, which found that it is not only possible to extend the Second Avenue Subway line construction west to Broadway, serving hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, but that performing the tunneling work as a follow-on to the current East Harlem extension would save time and money.

Governor Hochul will support the next phase of this project with funding for design and preliminary engineering to advance tunneling across 125th Street. The extension along 125th Street will improve commutes for millions of New Yorkers, save significant time for commuters benefiting from intersections with seven north-south subway lines across Manhattan, and connect underserved communities to jobs.

## Chapter 4: Cutting Red Tape to Better Serve New Yorkers

Whether standing up the homes that will house a new generation of New Yorkers, running a business that will serve and employ our neighbors, or constructing the 21st century infrastructure that undergirds our economy, too often New Yorkers who want to build something new are stymied by red tape and bureaucratic obstacles that drive up costs and waste time.

It has become far too difficult to build in the United States, a challenge that is acutely felt here in New York. A recent analysis from Empire State Development (ESD) found that manufacturing, housing and energy projects can take as much as 56 percent longer in New York State to get from concept to groundbreaking, as compared to peer states. Red tape and over-regulation that inhibit speedier building translate directly into higher rents, higher utility costs, higher tolls on roads, and higher property taxes to support the public infrastructure every New Yorker relies on.

This challenge is especially acute in the context of New York's housing crisis. The cost of housing in New York State is at record highs, well in excess of the national average. In New York City, the vacancy rate is a record-low 1.4 percent. This crisis demands urgent action; the only way to reduce costs is to build more housing, and to build it faster and cheaper than today.

The challenge of excessive bureaucracy extends beyond building. Small businesses struggle to navigate complex licensing requirements and regulatory hurdles; government procurement processes are often slow and opaque, preventing taxpayers from getting the best value for their dollars; and too many New Yorkers find it unnecessarily difficult to access government benefits.

Governor Hochul has already made substantial progress in making government work better on behalf of New Yorkers. Since 2021, the Governor's administration has:

- Announced the creation of the Office of Performance Management and Innovation to drive transparency, accountability and efficiency, creating a culture of continuous improvement across state government.
- Hired the first-ever Chief Experience Officer, charged with working with state agencies to

improve service delivery for New Yorkers. Already, significant gains have been made to save New Yorkers time and get them the services they need including: modernizing medical billing to cut dispute timelines at the Workers' Compensation Board by 92 percent; reducing state licensing processing times by 70 percent since 2023; and modernizing the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program website into a clear, mobile-friendly experience which has increased participation to 450,000 New Yorkers.

- Accelerated permitting of clean energy projects by making the Office of Renewable Energy Siting and Electric Transmission (ORES) a one-stop shop for expediting renewable generation and critical transmission infrastructure projects, while prioritizing environmental protection and community engagement. New York State has become a leader in clean energy deployment, permitting 34 large-scale projects representing 4.3 gigawatts of clean power in the last five years.
- Launched NY HELPS to temporarily suspend civil service testing requirements and reduce barriers to employment in state and local governments, leading to more than 37,000 state appointments and 13,000 local appointments in a wide range of critical roles, including nurses, social workers, engineers, and technology developers.

Building on this progress and redoubling her commitment to saving New Yorkers time and money, Governor Hochul is announcing a whole-of-government effort to cut red tape and better serve New Yorkers.

The Governor will launch the “Let Them Build” agenda, a set of common-sense reforms to get the State out of the way of progress, allowing localities to build housing and other critical projects faster and more affordably while continuing to protect the environment. She will also announce an ambitious set of actions to cut red tape, reduce unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles, and accelerate project delivery so that New Yorkers can get the housing, services, and infrastructure they need.

## *Launching the Let Them Build Agenda*

Fifty years ago, New York State enacted the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), a groundbreaking law to protect New York's air, water, and nature from pollution. SEQRA's central premise—the preservation of our natural resource—remains as critical today as it was in 1976.

However, recent decades of halting growth in housing and infrastructure expansion have demonstrated the urgent need for thoughtful modernization that addresses the most pressing needs that New Yorkers are facing—affordable housing, reliable energy, and modern transportation infrastructure—while still protecting the environment.

Every year, thousands of housing and other projects across New York are subject to an extensive environmental review process mandated by SEQRA. The exhaustive review requirements demanded by SEQRA are layered on top of separate state and local regulatory and permit requirements that carefully govern water use, air quality, environmental justice, and protection of natural resources; as well as local zoning and land use requirements, which are set at the local, not state, level, and entail further review and public scrutiny.

For many types of projects that are critical for New Yorkers, including much-needed new housing, SEQRA imposes significant time and cost, even for categories of projects that are consistently found to have negligible environmental impacts. And, far too often, SEQRA is weaponized to delay or even block housing development, especially affordable housing and other important projects that local communities support. Governor Hochul is committed to protecting the environment, while reducing red tape for projects that will not have significant environmental impacts.

To address these challenges, Governor Hochul is announcing the Let Them Build agenda, a set of common-sense and balanced reforms to SEQRA and executive actions intended to build housing and other critical infrastructure projects faster and cheaper. Together, these actions will allow projects that localities want to prioritize move forward more quickly, advancing smarter growth while ensuring we continue to protect communities, preserve our environment, and conserve New York's natural resources.

## **Helping Our Communities Build Housing We Need**

When Governor Hochul took office, she vowed to tackle the housing crisis and bring down costs by building the housing that New Yorkers desperately need so that more hard-working families, nurses, teachers, and first responders can afford a place to call home. However, too many projects in New York, including much-needed affordable housing developments, are forced to navigate a web of red tape created by state mandates that add unnecessary costs and years of needless delays, despite these projects consistently being found to have no significant environmental impact. Studies have quantified how State-mandated environmental review can slow down housing projects by an average of two years, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars per project, at a time when New Yorkers can least afford the wait for the housing they need to continue to live and thrive in New York.

To speed up the development of housing to create a more affordable and sustainable New York, Governor Hochul will propose to amend the state SEQRA law to classify certain types of housing projects that are compliant with local zoning and have no significant impacts on the environment as not in need of additional SEQRA review. Projects will still be required to comply with crucial state regulatory and permit requirements governing water use, air quality, environmental justice, and protection of natural resources, as well as local zoning and permitting requirements. Projects must also be located outside of flood risk areas in order to qualify. The type of housing project that can be reclassified under SEQRA will differ according to the housing needs and contexts of different parts of the state. In New York City, the State will set caps on the size a building must be to avoid the requirement of additional SEQRA review, with caps varying on the basis of the density of the neighborhoods as determined by the City. In the rest of the state, to avoid additional SEQRA review, housing projects must be on previously disturbed land, connected to existing water and sewer systems, and subject to additional unit caps. Across all of New York, projects eligible to bypass SEQRA review must comply with all locally controlled zoning requirements.

A review by New York City and New York State Homes and Community Renewal over the last five to ten years of over a thousand housing projects found that virtually none of such projects ultimately were found to have significant environmental impacts, but nevertheless were still subject to lengthy reviews. These reforms will accelerate the delivery of much needed housing and reduce the cost of building in ways that are consistent with sustainable and environmentally protective development, driving down the cost of housing and rents across the state while protecting our natural resources.

## **Accelerating Critical Infrastructure Projects**

Governor Hochul will also propose to facilitate the speedier, cheaper delivery of a broad range of beneficial infrastructure projects that New Yorkers depend on. She will propose to adjust SEQRA's classifications to allow important categories of projects as not in need of additional SEQRA review to start serving New Yorkers faster. Type II projects will include clean water infrastructure projects that avoid impacts on natural resources, green infrastructure and nature-based storm water management, public parks and recreational bike and pedestrian paths on previously disturbed land, and new or renovated child care centers on previously disturbed land.

Governor Hochul's proposal will reserve these fast-track environmental review processes for only those projects proceeding in previously disturbed areas, meaning areas that have already been developed or improved, which provides the dual benefit of protecting our natural resources and undisturbed lands, while strengthening our neighborhoods. The Governor's approach will yield tangible environmental benefits including improved air and water quality, a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, and the preservation of critical habitats when compared to policies that encourage sprawl and unchecked development of natural areas. In addition, Governor Hochul will direct the New York Power Authority (NYPA) and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) to update their regulations to facilitate and speed up the deployment of clean energy projects.

Combined, these actions will drastically reduce administrative steps and accelerate project timelines, while maintaining local zoning requirements and the strict environmental standards required for all other state permits, ensuring progress does not come at the expense of our residents or natural resources.

## **Delivering Faster Decisions for Local Communities through Clear Timelines and Accountability**

Currently SEQRA review timelines vary greatly across projects, creating unpredictability for local communities, project sponsors, and state agencies alike. This unpredictability can contribute to significant project delays and add substantial costs to project budgets. To drive further accountability and streamline the environmental review process, Governor Hochul will ensure project review is

subject to a two-year maximum deadline for completion of a SEQRA environmental impact statement from a positive declaration (i.e., the initial decision to move forward with an environmental impact statement) to the issuance of the final agency decision. Extensions could be evaluated in certain circumstances.

Governor Hochul will also clarify exactly when the time to challenge an environmental review begins to accrue. This change aligns the legal clock for environmental concerns with the clock for the project's actual permits, such as a site plan or subdivision approval. By doing this, the State removes court confusion and ensures that all legal challenges follow the same schedule.

## **Streamlining Environmental Impact Statements to Cut Down Review Timelines**

To accelerate the process of developing environmental impact statements, which are time-intensive assessments of how a proposed project would impact the environment, Governor Hochul will direct the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to develop Generic Environmental Impact Statements (GEISs). GEISs are comprehensive reviews for common project types which allow developers to quickly progress through the environmental review process and guide their upfront decision making and site selection. Governor Hochul will direct DEC to develop new GEISs to cut down environmental review timelines for selected types of renewable energy and housing projects.

## **Modernizing Permitting Processes to Save Time and Money for Localities**

It has been decades since some of New York's state agencies have updated their processes and technologies used to review and approve permits, which are a critical and often time-consuming step in building desired new infrastructure. Outdated permitting processes drive up costs and create needless bureaucratic hoops for projects to jump through. To modernize and expedite these processes, Governor Hochul will direct state agencies involved in permitting and environmental reviews to conduct an end-to-end review of their processes and identify opportunities to accelerate reviews and alleviate bottlenecks, with recommendations to be made no later than September 1, 2026.

Governor Hochul will also provide support to agencies to consider and implement new technologies to help streamline reviews. As part of this effort, the DEC will launch Smart Access, a consolidated platform for applicants and government agencies to follow the progress of permits and environmental reviews in real time and access the latest documents. In addition, to drive accountability, increase transparency, and help agencies meet timelines established in law, Governor Hochul will direct state agencies, in partnership with the newly established Office of Performance Management and Innovation (OPMI), to develop internal performance tracking systems to monitor the status of permits and environmental reviews.

Together, these efforts will help us accelerate project reviews, while maintaining our commitment to important permits and reviews intended to protect our environment and keep our communities safe.

## **Expediting Major State Infrastructure Projects**

To help expedite the delivery of the most significant projects in the state, Governor Hochul will establish a new program to streamline and speed up permitting processes for key economic development and infrastructure projects across New York, within the relevant legislative framework. The program will be used to oversee and monitor the permitting process of designated projects of statewide significance, such as the new Nuclear Generation Project in Upstate New York or the new IBX transit line in New York City, to reduce wait times for the workers, businesses, students and families who depend on these projects while continuing to prioritize safety. For designated projects, the program will be responsible for setting and overseeing clear, transparent permitting schedules; assist with interagency, federal, and local coordination; accelerate permitting processes; and address other issues as they arise.

DEC, ESD, Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), OPMI and other state agencies will work closely to track and report on timelines and will identify policy or process reforms that should be advanced to further expedite project delivery.

## **Supporting Local Communities Through a Permitting Academy**

Many localities face significant challenges navigating the complicated web of local, state, and federal

permitting requirements, especially smaller localities with limited staff. To tackle this issue, the State will provide enhanced support and education to local governments to help them better understand the SEQRA process, which will help ensure a more effective environmental review. The State, in partnership with Regional Economic Development Councils, will conduct a series of workshops with local governments to cover best practices and provide assistance for localities in need of additional support.

## **Driving Economic Growth by Activating Underutilized Sites in the North Country**

New York's commitment to our forest preserves, including the Adirondack Park, is defined by the "Forever Wild" clause, which is a constitutional promise that our Forest Preserve will remain a pristine legacy for generations. However, today, several former correctional facilities—Camp Gabriels, Moriah Shock, and Mount McGregor—sit dormant. These crumbling sites are more than just eyesores; they are environmental hazards and lost opportunities for the people who call the North Country home.

To address this, Governor Hochul will propose a constitutional amendment to return these underutilized sites to productive and critically needed uses, such as for housing development, while also securing a win for conservation. By authorizing the redevelopment of these specific locations, Governor Hochul will at the same time propose adding even more land into the Forest Preserve.

## ***Making Government Work Better***

### **Making Every New Yorker Count**

The decennial census has a determinative impact on New York's political representation and access to federal funding. Following the 2020 Census, the state lost a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives by a margin of only 89 residents—one of the narrowest margins in history. Undercounting New York residents directly impacts the state's influence in Washington, and risks our fair share of the billions of dollars in federal aid that support our roads, bridges, hospitals and

schools, as well as vital programs that families depend on such as Medicaid, SNAP, and the Women, Infants, and Children program (WIC).

As the federal government signals a shift in responsibility for census operations to the states, Governor Hochul will kick off the census planning process early, ensuring New York secures its fair share of federal resources and every community is accurately represented in Albany and Washington for the decade to come. She will take proactive steps to ensure that all New Yorkers—including historically hard-to-count populations such as low-income residents, children under five, and renters—are fully represented. Specifically, she will:

- Establish a state census commission responsible for strategic planning, coordination, and community outreach.
- Identify a lead planner for the State to drive planning efforts and coordinate across agencies.
- Call on agencies and community-based organizations to lead public education efforts and build trust, especially in hard-to-count neighborhoods.
- Support counties, cities, townships and tribal governments in updating the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA), ensuring every residence is accurately mapped. In 2020 New York State's focus on LUCA efforts helped ensure local governments submitted almost 900,000 new and corrected addresses to the Census Bureau, which increased the projected state population by over 800,000.

## **Tackling Outdated and Burdensome Regulations that Stand in the Way of Delivering**

Governor Hochul has heard from countless New Yorkers about the challenges they encounter trying to navigate red tape and unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles—from small businesses trying to get off the ground, local leaders trying to build the housing and infrastructure we need, or families navigating complicated processes to access the benefits and services they depend on. In addition to legislative proposals included elsewhere such as common-sense reforms to SEQRA, Governor Hochul is driving a statewide effort to speed up government by tackling outdated and unnecessary regulations that stand in the way of delivering for New Yorkers.

In October, Governor Hochul directed state agencies to identify outdated or obsolete regulations. In response, agencies and stakeholders have identified a wide array of regulations that could potentially be amended or eliminated. Governor Hochul is now launching a broader 30-day call for ideas from stakeholders and constituents across New York, including localities, community organizations, and businesses, on opportunities to cut red tape and reform regulations. Finally, the Governor will be deploying new technology to review New York State's regulations, reports, and policies to identify targets for further staff review that add unnecessary process, undue burden, or are simply out-of-date. Together, this regulatory reform agenda will make it easier, faster, and more affordable to deliver critical projects and services that New Yorkers need.

## **Streamlining Public Procurement**

Public procurement in New York State is subject to extensive red tape; while these process steps are well-intentioned, many of them are out-of-date and slow down the state's ability to deliver for New Yorkers and our partners, including in low-risk contexts. Governor Hochul will make changes to procurement rules to help streamline procurement so that work to support New Yorkers can advance more efficiently, and vendor partners can be paid more efficiently; the goal of these proposals is to cut procurement timelines by several months, particularly for routine and low-risk purchases.

Governor Hochul will propose legislation to raise the discretionary thresholds for purchases by state agencies, which have not been updated since 2006, to \$300,000. This new threshold is expected to significantly expedite the procurement process from six to nine months to one month for relatively low-risk purchases for agencies, which have sufficient internal processes and controls in place to manage and oversee these contracts. In addition, she will propose legislation to increase the New York State Contract Reporter threshold to match the new discretionary threshold, saving up to thirty additional days per procurement.

Lastly, Governor Hochul will also improve the speed and efficiency of purchases and payments, by proposing legislation to remove the provision requiring approval from the Office of the State Comptroller for centralized contracts before any purchase order or other procurement transaction for procurements of over \$200,000. This change is expected to accelerate purchases by up to 60 days.

## **Delivering More with Smart Technology**

As part of her commitment to streamline project timelines and costs, Governor Hochul is announcing a new effort to help government workers work smarter and more efficiently by using new technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), to accelerate permitting and procurement processes.

In the permitting space, AI and other new technologies can help save time for agency reviewers and applicants on routine tasks so that they can spend more time on important issues. For example, AI can help complete initial completeness checks to ensure applications have the required content before being submitted, identify common issues and bottlenecks in permitting processes, and summarize data and project plans. This year, Governor Hochul will launch a pilot with several state agencies to utilize AI and other technologies in permitting processes to save workers time and deliver projects faster and more efficiently for New Yorkers.

In addition, Governor Hochul will kick off a process to incorporate AI and other technologies in the procurement processes for the over 1,200 contracts that New York State oversees, without sacrificing human judgment from state workers. To better serve New Yorkers, Governor Hochul will ask agencies to review and identify new tools to streamline procurement processes and ensure New Yorkers are getting more for their money, by taking on tasks like comparing prices and costs across contracts, identifying vendors, and generating solicitations, pulling only from State-approved sources to ensure accuracy. These tools can also be used to help generate initial drafts for Statements of Work, bidder instructions, and evaluation methodology, features particularly relevant to municipalities and nonprofits that lack the in-house capability or expertise to write high-quality, accurate solicitations.



# Chapter 5: Protecting New York's Consumers and Workers

For Governor Hochul, affordability and consumer protection go hand in hand. New Yorkers work hard—they shouldn't be taken advantage of by unscrupulous employers who skim their wages, fine print that hides extra costs, or businesses that don't deliver what they promise. For the past four years she has pushed back on institutions that prioritize profit over people, and that fight continues today.

Protecting consumers means protecting them online, as well; New Yorkers should be able to trust technology and safely interact with tools that work for, not against them. Thanks to Governor Hochul, New York leads the nation in not just protecting young people online, but putting common-sense safeguards around AI, algorithms, and other technical advances that create unintended consequences for our families. The Governor has coupled thoughtful regulation alongside record investments in everything from supercomputers to semiconductors, proving states don't have to choose between responsible regulation and rapid innovation.

Governor Hochul's administration has:

- Restricted addictive features of social media for kids, establishing important national precedent about age assurance, and limited online sites from collecting and selling their data without consent.
- Set first-in-the nation safeguards for AI chatbots posing as friends, diverting user conversations about self-harm to mental health resources and interrupting unhealthy addictive behaviors.
- Outlawed AI-generated child sexual material.
- Set first-in-the-nation requirements that companies disclose when they conduct surveillance pricing—a formerly opaque practice where businesses set individualized prices using consumer personal data.
- Eliminated exploitative overdraft fees and capped the number of daily overdraft charges.

- Passed legislation to make canceling a subscription as easy as signing up.
- Passed legislation to establish a licensing and supervision framework for Buy Now, Pay Later lenders.
- Expanded a key consumer protection law for the first time in 45 years by prohibiting unfair and abusive business practices.

In 2026, Governor Hochul will build on this work by strengthening data privacy protections, fighting workers' compensation fraud, and ensuring transparency in areas from AI-generated deepfakes to student loans. She will also announce a new, first-of-its-kind office to oversee digital safety and technological governance, ensuring New York has the strategic leadership and resources needed to pioneer new approaches while protecting our rights.

## **Creating a New Office of Digital Innovation, Governance, Integrity, and Trust (DIGIT)**

Under Governor Hochul's leadership, New York has led the nation in embracing the opportunities of emerging technology while also taking novel action to protect New Yorkers from potential harms. The Governor has passed multiple first-in-the-nation laws to keep kids safe on social media, regulate frontier AI model developers, stop AI companion chatbots from encouraging suicide and self-harm, outlaw AI-generated child sexual abuse material, and bring transparency to AI-enabled corporate pricing practices. As our digital ecosystem continues to rapidly evolve, and in absence of action by the federal government, Governor Hochul will ensure New York continues to pioneer new approaches to protecting consumers, voters, and our youth.

Building on New York's role as a national leader in AI regulation and online safety, Governor Hochul will create a first-of-its kind Office of Digital Innovation, Governance, Integrity, and Trust (DIGIT). DIGIT will serve as a central, authoritative body for digital safety and technological governance, devising new approaches and ensuring consistent enforcement to keep New Yorkers safe online, while protecting New York's position as a state that values and invests in cutting-edge innovation.

## **Protecting Our Private Data**

The data broker industry is a multi-billion-dollar industry that operates largely in the shadows, collecting and selling vast amounts of personal information. An average data broker may have over 1,000 data points about a single individual, with major data broker companies collecting over 10,000 unique data points per person. This information is then sold, primarily to marketers and financial institutions—although predatory loan companies and criminal scammers have also been known to purchase it.

To date, this market has been unregulated within New York State, allowing it to operate without clear rules of the road that prioritize consumer privacy and control. Governor Hochul will rein in these brokers, significantly restricting their ability to retain New Yorkers' personal information. Specifically, she will advance legislation to require all data brokers operating in New York State to register with the State as data brokers, and to allow New Yorkers to submit a single, centralized request to have certain categories of personal data obtained by data brokers deleted. Combined, these actions will help New Yorkers keep more control of their personal data.

## **Requiring Labeling for AI-Generated Content**

AI deepfakes are rapidly eroding public trust by fueling the spread of disinformation, enabling scams, manipulating voters, and harming reputations. With a few clicks, anyone can create convincing audio, video, or images that mimic real people and situations, making people more likely to believe fake news stories or fall for scams. The increasing prevalence of these digitally manipulated or manufactured audio-visual content threatens to erode public trust and even society's shared sense of a common reality.

Governor Hochul will tackle the issue of misleading AI deepfakes by advancing legislation that requires AI-generated content to include labeling about its origins and creation. Called "provenance data," this information may be used like a digital nutrition label, allowing people to better understand more about where content comes from—as well as what might be real and what's not.

## **Protecting Elections from Misleading or Deceptive AI Content**

With the rise of artificial intelligence, algorithmic social media, and other new technologies, it's easier than ever to spread misinformation about elections. Deepfakes and false AI-generated content pose a particular threat to fair elections, with misleading and deceptive content being deployed explicitly to sway people's votes. In 2024 alone, fraudsters used AI to create fake expletive-laden "recordings" of one New York politician while falsely depicting another in a prison jumpsuit. That same year, thousands of New Hampshire residents received calls from an AI-generated "politician" asking them to skip voting in an upcoming primary election. In 2020, 5,500 New Yorkers received a robocall falsely claiming that mail-in voting would result in their information being sent to law enforcement and credit collectors.

Manipulating elections threatens our democracy. The State already requires campaigns to disclose when they use AI in close proximity to an election, but those requirements do not extend beyond the content campaigns generate themselves. To go a step further to protect voters from manipulative AI content, Governor Hochul will advance legislation to ban non-consensual deepfakes in specified periods leading up to elections, including depictions of opposition candidates.

In addition, Governor Hochul will advance legislation to ban sharing false information about elections, including where and when they are held, qualifications or restrictions on voter eligibility, and an individual's voter registration status or eligibility.

## **Prohibiting Misleading "Discounts" in Online Sales**

When a consumer comes across an advertised "sale" or "discount," they have every expectation of saving some of their hard-earned money at check out. However, there have been documented instances of retailers that raise original prices just before sales begin so they can display outsized "markdowns," misleading consumers—and often not saving them money at all.

New Yorkers have the right to know that a discount means a discount. The Governor will crack down on misleading practices by advancing legislation codifying existing federal rules that require discounts to be "bona fide" or genuine and represent an actual discount on a regularly offered reference price. As a result, New York consumers can be assured that they are actually saving when an item is on sale.

## **Ending Taxes on Tips**

Tipped workers—New York’s bartenders, servers, and delivery workers—are the backbone of the state’s service economy. In jobs that demand long hours and daily dedication, every dollar is hard-won. Governor Hochul is committed to making sure these workers can hold on to more of what they earn.

To that end, Governor Hochul will advance legislation eliminating state income taxes on up to \$25,000 of tipped income in tax year 2026, consistent with federal tax guidance. This proposal will deliver meaningful relief to tipped workers, strengthening their economic security and better valuing their contributions to our economy.

## **Fighting Workers’ Compensation Fraud**

Workers’ compensation fraud is a pernicious criminal activity that increases costs for businesses and insurers, affecting employers’ decisions when it comes to other costs like employee wages and benefits. The Workers’ Compensation Board provides annual funding to the Workers’ Compensation Fraud Inspector General (WCFIG) to investigate fraud. However, WCFIG’s referrals to law enforcement often go unprosecuted because district attorneys lack the funding and staff to establish dedicated workers’ compensation fraud units.

To combat instances of workers’ compensation fraud, Governor Hochul will advance legislation that allows the Workers’ Compensation Board to offer resources that will allow district attorneys to establish dedicated workers’ compensation fraud units. This funding will ensure they have the necessary resources to investigate and prosecute these crimes, ultimately protecting honest workers and helping to reduce costs for businesses across New York State.

## **Combating Wage Theft**

An honest day’s work deserves an honest day’s pay, and employers that cheat New Yorkers out of their hard-earned wages must be held accountable. Some wage theft violations include failure to pay at the minimum wage, not paying out mandated overtime, stealing tips, and misclassifying workers.

Governor Hochul has taken a stand against this activity by classifying wage theft as a form of criminal larceny and providing the Department of Labor (DOL) new lien and levy powers to help recover stolen wages on behalf of workers.

This year, the State will expand on these efforts by ensuring that district attorneys have the resources to dedicate to wage theft cases. Governor Hochul will direct new funding for a grant program administered by DOL to support district attorneys, particularly in smaller, rural jurisdictions, to take on new criminal wage theft investigations, further solidifying New York State's commitment to protecting workers' rights.

## **Improving Disclosures for Student Loan Refinancing**

Refinancing of student loans is common in New York, with New Yorkers refinancing \$3.27 billion in student loans as of the end of 2024. Current laws require private lenders to disclose details like interest rates and fees, but not critical information regarding student benefits: specifically, that moving from public to private loans can mean losing student-facing benefits like loan forgiveness or income-based payment.

To ensure students can make informed decisions about their loans, Governor Hochul will propose legislation requiring lenders to provide clear notices to borrowers about the pros and cons of refinancing. In doing so, she will help students choose repayment paths that best secure their financial future.

## **Setting Cosigner Standards for Student Loans**

People with low or no credit, especially students, often need cosigners to help them secure private student loans. Since student loans can take decades to repay, cosigners remain liable for someone else's debt for years or even decades after origination.

Governor Hochul will propose legislation creating a standard release process for private student loan cosigners, and requiring lenders and servicers to disclose these conditions to borrowers. In addition, she will allow cosigners to be released from their loans after the borrower has made a

reasonable number of on-time payments. Doing so will ensure New Yorkers aren't stuck with loans they shouldn't be responsible for.

## **Enhancing Illegal Vape Enforcement**

Despite being banned and lacking Federal Drug Administration (FDA) approval, flavored vapor products are still being sold throughout New York State. Estimates suggest that as many as 99 percent of current vapor product sales are flavored, and therefore illegal. To help halt this trend and the harmful effects flavored vapes have, Governor Hochul will direct New York's Department of Taxation and Finance (DTF) to create a Vapor Products registry that identifies the vapor products that may be legally sold in the State, with prohibited flavored products deemed contraband. These actions will minimize and prevent the illegal and dangerous sale of harmful vape products to New Yorkers.



## Chapter 6: Driving Innovation and Economic Development by and for New Yorkers

Governor Hochul is building a brighter future for New York. Since taking office, the Governor has ushered in a new era of economic growth by prioritizing job creation, community development, and economic revitalization. From investing in innovative new technologies to supporting small businesses, this forward-thinking strategy is shaping a resilient and inclusive economy that sets up New York State to compete in technological advancement on an international scale now, and for generations to come. During her time in office, Governor Hochul has:

- Established New York as a leader in semiconductor innovation, recently breaking ground on a new semiconductor research and development facility at the NY Creates Albany Nanotech Complex.
- Transformed the life science sector by establishing two new Cell and Gene Therapy (CGT) Innovation Hubs. These facilities are poised to revolutionize patient care by fast-tracking CGT research and commercialization, ensuring life-changing new therapies are developed in New York.
- Deployed AI for the public good by launching Empire AI, a landmark public-private consortium, which expands access to AI supercomputing for New York's leading universities and research institutions, strengthening innovation with a public benefit and enhancing New York's position as a global leader in responsible AI.
- Created multiple programs to remove barriers for small businesses through the \$500 million State Small Business Credit Initiative, focusing on equitable venture investments, affordable borrowing programs, and capital access programs.

Governor Hochul remains committed to growing New York's vibrant economy, bringing jobs back home, revitalizing communities, and cementing New York as the center for innovation.

## *Promoting Tech and Biotech*

### **Making New York State “Chips Country” via a Downstate Semiconductor Chip Design Center**

New York is a national leader in semiconductor manufacturing—one of the most cutting-edge and critical industries for the 21st century economy. Semiconductors power everything from smartphones to satellites, and the sector is poised to generate revenues of \$1 trillion globally by the end of the decade. As New York builds a thriving domestic semiconductor ecosystem, supporting world-class research and development (R&D) for larger established firms, there is room for expansion in early-stage semiconductor chip R&D by tapping into aspiring startups that may lack access to early-stage chip design tools.

To both attract semiconductor manufacturers that are looking to invest in states with a robust chip innovation pipeline and support startups looking to be competitive in the space, New York will launch a downstate-based Semiconductor Chip Design Center. This initiative will focus on leveraging downstate's deep knowledge economy ecosystem to complement the already-robust chip manufacturing infrastructure upstate. The Center will be a world-class chip design facility, serving as an incubator for early-stage firms, training chip designers, and connecting startups to the larger semiconductor sector throughout New York State. By fostering the earliest stages of development, New York will establish itself as a leader in this essential technology and support further growth of downstream manufacturing.

### **Building Our Quantum Edge through Quantum Technology Commercialization Hubs**

Quantum technology provides us with the ability to solve some of the world's most complex challenges faster than ever before. It has the potential to transform our world, revolutionizing whole industries with breakthroughs in computing, sensing, and secure communication. Practical applications include innovations like more secure financial transactions, advances in clean and renewable technology, and faster protein modeling for drug discovery. Establishing New York's

leadership in this emerging field also opens the door to significant economic growth. Globally, quantum technologies are projected to generate \$97 billion in revenue by 2035.

Access to quantum infrastructure, however, remains highly restricted: systems are prohibitively expensive, testing environments are limited, and most companies lack the technical capacity to build or deploy quantum capabilities independently. Building on the momentum of the State's Quantum Research and Innovation Hub at SUNY Stony Brook, New York will establish up to four quantum hubs across New York that will serve as incubators and foster the development and commercialization of quantum technologies. These hubs will be regional anchors for quantum innovation, prioritizing commercialization of new inventions and real-world use cases. Each hub will host an incubator for quantum-focused startups, providing early-stage companies with critical resources, including mentorship and access to local quantum networks and quantum computing.

These actions will ensure that New York remains a global hub for innovation and is positioned to compete nationally and globally as quantum technologies mature and reach their full market potential.

## **Launching Empire AI Beta and Creating the First Independent AI Research Center at SUNY Binghamton**

Governor Hochul launched Empire AI, a first-in-the-nation consortium of public and private research institutions advancing AI research for the public good at scale, to catapult New York as a leader in researching and applying AI in positive ways. New York's Empire AI system, powered by the world's most advanced academic supercomputer housed at the State University of New York at Buffalo, is already applying large-scale, cutting-edge tech to some of the world's most pressing research endeavors.

Last year, Governor Hochul announced funding to equip the second phase of supercomputing power, Empire AI Beta. Today, Empire AI Beta is being installed alongside the Alpha system, together allowing hundreds of researchers from the now nine member institutions to continue to advance AI research for public good. The new Beta system dramatically accelerates Empire AI's performance to 11 times its former scale, making it the world's most advanced academic supercomputer. Empire AI Alpha and Empire AI Beta allow member institutions to conduct critical AI research as soon as possible while the future full-scale Empire AI system is underway.

Building on her nation-leading Empire AI initiative, Governor Hochul will announce a record-breaking gift to the State University of New York at Binghamton provided by private donors to create the only public university center built to ensure AI is advancing the public interest. The \$30 million philanthropic gift is augmented with a \$25 million capital investment by SUNY.

The investment—which is the largest academic gift in the University’s history—will establish the Center as the nation’s premier academic hub for harnessing science and engineering to create responsible, repeatable, and transparent artificial intelligence. Its goal is to research ways to harness the awesome power of AI for public benefit and serve as a premier center for foundational technical research into safety, security, and transparency of AI models and systems to help ensure AI serves the public good, place New York at the forefront of a new technical discipline in the public interest, and attract AI talent to New York. This investment will advance public safety by bringing together leadership in innovation, research, and public service to ensure that significant capital is being leveraged to find ways to use AI for the benefit of our communities.

## **Bolstering Biotechnology Statewide**

New York’s biotechnology and life sciences industry is an engine of economic growth. Research and development in biotech not only advances the public good, measured in groundbreaking advancements to cure disease, but also generates new high-paying jobs while opening pathways for entrepreneurs and startups. Building off the Governor’s strategic investments in life sciences, including the creation of Cell and Gene Therapy Innovation Hubs on Long Island and in Western New York and the Biodefense Commercialization Fund to find new treatments for infectious diseases, Governor Hochul will launch a renewed investment to make New York the epicenter of life sciences innovation.

The Governor’s Bolstering Biotech Initiative will support all phases of the life science sector pipeline—from discovery to commercialization—cementing New York’s position at the forefront of biotech innovation.

These investments will accelerate the commercialization of life-changing therapeutics—with a focus on neurodegenerative disease—and catalyze private investment in biotechnology research and development through the following programs:

- Statewide Clinical Trial Consortium: Establishing a statewide clinical trial consortium to leverage the combined strengths of New York's research institutions to expand access to cutting-edge therapies and position the state as a premier destination for medical innovation.
- Venture Capital Investments: Leveraging public and private venture investment to support promising startups with the potential to mature into the next generation of industry leaders.
- Fellowships and Workforce Development: Seeding new skills-training programs designed to equip New Yorkers with the necessary skills to fill high-demand roles from production to c-suite in the biotech field, opening pathways to high-paying jobs for New Yorkers.
- Commercialization Grant Program: Creating a new, performance-based grant program modeled on the state's successful Biodefense Commercialization Program to support companies in bringing biotech innovations to market in targeted areas such as neurodegenerative diseases.

Together, these strategic investments will strengthen every step of the life science value chain, from initial research and development, to startup growth and workforce training, to large-scale industry attraction, to fostering collaboration among medical schools and industry leaders. Through the Governor's Bolstering Biotech Initiative, New York will accelerate innovation, scale promising companies, attract private capital, create high-paying jobs, and build a skilled workforce to lead in biotech nationally and around the world.

## ***Supporting Farmers and Manufacturers***

### **Modernizing Manufacturing in Tough Times**

New York's manufacturing sector is essential to the state's economic vitality, contributing over \$100 billion to the state's gross domestic product and employing more than 410,000 New Yorkers.

Governor Hochul is bringing manufacturing back to New York State, including landing one of the largest manufacturing projects in U.S. history with the Micron project in Central New York.

To build on this momentum and support job growth in the face of retractive federal policy, Governor Hochul will direct Empire State Development (ESD) to launch the Governor's Manufacturing Modernization Program to support the state's small and mid-size manufacturers. The program will establish a network of Centers across the state, focused on assisting small and mid-size manufacturers in adopting new technologies. These Centers will provide such support as technical assistance to small manufacturers as they incorporate AI into their operations, supply chain consultations to help businesses adapt to geopolitical and tariff impacts, and capital grants to help manufacturers modernize equipment or pivot to priority sectors, such as clean energy.

These actions will drive innovation while creating new family-sustaining jobs in manufacturing, ensuring that New York's homegrown companies remain competitive and resilient, and that the Governor's track record of success in reshoring manufacturing continues in a rapidly evolving global economy.

## **Supporting Dairy Farmers to Modernize the Industry**

Since taking office, Governor Hochul has presided over an unprecedented expansion of the state's dairy manufacturing sector. New York has celebrated investments across the state, including a \$650 million fairlife production plant in Webster, a nearly \$30 million expansion of the Agri-Mark cheese manufacturing facility in Chateaugay, a new \$1.2 billion Chobani yogurt manufacturing facility in Rome, Wells Enterprises' \$425 million ice cream manufacturing facility in Dunkirk, and more, reinforcing New York's status as the leading milk producer in the Northeast. There are currently nearly 300 globally recognized dairy processing plants statewide.

The link between dairy farming and production with manufacturing and processing entities creates a flourishing economic cycle, benefiting farmers, dairy sector workers, and consumers alike. However, dairy farmers are facing a complex constellation of challenges, including tariffs on feed, aging infrastructure, rising operating costs, and ongoing supply chain challenges that make it harder for farms to plan and invest for the future.

Governor Hochul will expand support for dairy farmers by advancing another round of the Dairy Modernization Program and extending the refundable investment tax credit to give farms the time and certainty needed to modernize operations and complete major projects. Extending the refundable investment tax credit will also provide farmers with necessary financial support to offset

the increased costs of doing business caused by federal tariffs action. These actions will help farmers upgrade on-farm storage and processing systems, improve efficiency and milk quality, and continue investing in equipment and facilities despite tight margins and market volatility. By strengthening the dairy supply chain and supporting rural communities across the state, New York will protect jobs, ensure a stable food supply, and secure the long-term competitiveness of its dairy industry.

## **Protecting Farmers from the Disruption of Federal Tariffs**

Agriculture is a cornerstone of New York's economy, yet the federal government's misguided tariff policy has threatened the competitiveness of our farmers. By inciting trade wars with key international partners like Canada and Mexico, federal actions have driven up the cost of essential resources—like seeds, fertilizer, and necessary machinery—while creating market instability. Although the USDA recently announced a national assistance program, it is fundamentally flawed for New York given that as designed it leaves specialty crops and the dairy sector with no meaningful support.

To address this issue caused by federal policy, Governor Hochul is proposing the Agricultural Resiliency Against Tariffs Program, which will provide \$30 million in direct payments to New York specialty crop growers, livestock producers, and dairy farmers. This initiative will quickly distribute much needed support to offset rising costs caused by tariffs. This program reinforces New York's commitment to our agricultural community, while safeguarding local jobs and ensuring our farmers have the certainty needed to compete in a volatile global marketplace.

## **Developing the Industrial Hemp Pipeline**

As Governor Hochul stated in her 2024 State of the State address, New York is committed to growing its bioeconomy—including the hemp industry—in order to create jobs and support farmers across the state. To support New York's hemp farmers in diversifying their supply chains in the face of a changing federal context and provide additional R&D efforts towards the industry with a focus on sustainable and affordable building materials, Governor Hochul will establish a statewide network of programs and assets focused on developing the industrial hemp pipeline end to end. A

research and development consortium across five New York universities will pilot the complete green economy for industrial hemp from cultivation and fiber processing to product manufacturing and construction, culminating in the construction of a facility that will serve both as a processing facility and a workforce training center. Together, these actions will grow our bioeconomy and support farmers across the state.

## **Investing in Equity Across the Cannabis Supply Chain**

Since recreational cannabis was legalized in 2021, New York has been focused on standing up the industry, including helping new businesses around the state get licensed and start operating. Five years later, with more than 550 dispensaries in a \$2.65 billion market, new needs are emerging as the industry matures. Across the supply chain and the state, we must build business development opportunities that move beyond licenses and startup support to include a focus on access to capital and long-term sustainability, continuing our success as the most equitable cannabis market in the country.

Governor Hochul will bolster the cannabis supply chain by creating a certified cannabis business incubator hub network, offering funding for loans to existing businesses, startup capital for new ones, a business development grant fund, a workforce development partnership with SUNY and CUNY, and a CUNY Law Foundation pro bono initiative. Made up of vetted service providers from across the state offering training and technical assistance in areas like legal and accounting, the network will serve as a one-stop shop for cannabis businesses from startup to scale, with a focus on groups prioritized by the Social and Economic Equity program (SEE) and communities disproportionately impacted (CDI). These initiatives will be created with guidance and engagement from communities, service-disabled Veterans, and farmers, as well as other stakeholders across the supply chain.

## *Investing in Communities*

### **Establishing New York as the Nation’s Hard Cider Capital**

New York is the country’s leading hard cider producer, boasting more active cideries than any other state. Our cider industry has grown substantially over the last ten years, generating over a billion dollars in total economic impact for New York, yet there still remains untapped agri-tourism potential to explore.

To support the industry and tap into the robust agri-tourism opportunity that cider presents, Governor Hochul will work with the New York Cider Association to establish New York as the State of Cider, marketing the orchards, tasting rooms, and food experiences that could become anchor destinations for visitors across the country. These actions will strengthen rural economies, uplift the exceptional work of local businesses, and establish New York as the foremost destination for American hard cider.

### **Modernizing the Alcoholic Beverage Control Law**

Businesses across the supply chain face out-of-date, Prohibition-era rules in New York. Governor Hochul will facilitate consumer choice and boost local economies by proposing legislation to modernize the Alcoholic Beverage Control Law (ABCL). For example, she will increase opportunities for alcoholic beverage manufacturers by allowing all producers to own up to three restaurant or tavern licenses and open restaurants or bars at their manufacturing facilities, encouraging out-of-state manufacturers to invest in New York and creating opportunities for New York businesses. In 2007 and 2014, laws were liberalized for farm manufacturers, but New York’s non-farm producers and all out-of-state producers still face these limitations. There is a need for modernizing licensing across the board, from sports bars and cafes to airport lounges, hotels, and movie theaters.

## **Eliminating Outdated Restrictions on Dancing**

For decades, complexity and lack of transparency in tavern, bar, and restaurant licensing has generated public confusion about dancing, often creating friction in communities. Under current rules, dancing is allowed in bars and taverns, after bureaucratic processes at the State Liquor Authority (SLA) and community board level but is not always allowed in restaurants. Because of this, some applicants—especially those who want to operate as a restaurant at some times and a bar or tavern at other times—self-identify as restaurants but operate as nightclubs. This erodes community trust, leads to higher complaint volumes, and requires the SLA to enforce against dancing.

To improve trust and transparency and cut red tape, Governor Hochul will charge SLA with allowing dancing by default in taverns and bars and creating a new hybrid restaurant-tavern license. For bars and taverns, no processes or need for public hearings will change, and community boards will be able to maintain their role making further stipulations. There will be no change for restaurants, whose license types do not allow patron dancing. For applicants who want to operate as both a restaurant and bar or club at different times, the new hybrid license type will bring more transparency to the community, as the license will accurately reflect the character of the establishment. Qualifying license types will continue to require community disclosure and comment periods for dancing and performance dancing consistent with statutory obligations.

## **Enhancing the Downtown Revitalization Initiative and New York Forward**

The State's Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) provides funds to revitalize and enhance downtown neighborhoods across the state, supporting infrastructure development, public transportation, job creation, and economic activity. New York Forward (NYF) similarly provides funds for downtown revitalization, but targets resources to smaller and rural communities such as villages and hamlets. Governor Hochul will announce a new round of investments into these programs, to continue to help communities develop downtown neighborhoods into vibrant centers that offer a high quality of life and are magnets for business, job creation, and economic and housing diversity.

## **Expanding the County Infrastructure Grant Program**

New York's County Infrastructure Grant program helps counties fund vital, small-scale infrastructure projects that impact the daily lives of New Yorkers and encourage visitation. These projects include the construction or rehabilitation of roads, sewers or utilities to encourage housing growth, improvements to municipal or public infrastructure to increase tourism, and the beautification of public spaces. Governor Hochul will announce \$50 million of additional funding to support these projects, helping counties modernize and rebuild their essential public infrastructure to remain competitive and generate economic growth.

## **Enhancing Local Economic Development Project Tracking**

Industrial development agencies and authorities (IDAs) are crucial vehicles for advancing economic development, housing and other priorities statewide, reporting over \$900 million in net tax exemption in 2024 alone. However, monitoring those investments can be challenging due to inefficiencies in the State's legacy tracking system. Local authorities are also leaving money on the table by not appropriately monitoring sales tax exemptions.

The Governor's proposal for overhauling the current system and replacing it with a well-developed, better-equipped analysis tool will enhance transparency, integrity, and efficiency, while also providing oversight data and allowing local authorities to better communicate project outcomes. Additionally, implementing her plan for the Authorities Budget Office's (ABO) Revenue Integrity Group will help recoup an estimated \$11 million in excess sales tax exemptions not currently policed.



## Chapter 7: Helping New York's Students Learn and Thrive

Governor Hochul believes every child should have the opportunity to thrive in New York. That includes access to high-quality, safe and supportive education, robust and thoughtfully designed mental health resources that meet children where they are, and a policy ecosystem that keeps kids safe online. Governor Hochul is committed to building on her robust track record as a champion for students, families, and teachers to creatively address many of the challenges New York families confront. To date, Governor Hochul's administration has:

- Invested \$37.6 billion in school aid, the highest level of school funding in state history, including fully funding Foundation Aid for the first time to ensure that resources reach the schools that need them the most.
- Implemented a universal free school meals policy—ensuring 2.7 million students receive free breakfast and lunch at school, addressing food insecurity in the classroom and driving down costs for families by an average of \$165 per child per month.
- Established a nation-leading policy to create distraction-free classrooms by banning the use of smartphones in schools statewide—an initiative that has already led to positive classroom environments and better student engagement in 83 percent of schools surveyed.
- Implemented free community college for students ages 25-55 pursuing careers in high-demand fields, with over 11,000 students participating already.
- Expanded the Tuition Assistance Program, increasing awards and raising income eligibility to benefit nearly 100,000 students. As a result of the expansion, over forty thousand students received aid for the first time.
- Expanded school-based mental health clinics, which help students get a licensed mental health care provider in a familiar stigma-free setting on their school campus. The state now supports 1,300 clinic satellites, up from 872 in 2020, covering 25 percent of all NYS public schools.

- Ensured school districts across the state are utilizing instructional best practices grounded in the Science of Reading to improve students' literacy achievement; the state is seeing improvements in student proficiency scores.

Governor Hochul will continue to build on this legacy by advancing a bold agenda that strengthens New York's schools, universities and colleges, youth mental health services, and online safety.

## ***Advancing Student Learning and Supports***

### **Back to Basics in Math: Transforming Math Learning through Quality Instruction and Professional Learning**

Governor Hochul worked with teachers and school districts to ensure schools are teaching students to read the right way—by aligning instructional best practices with the evidence-based Science of Reading principles. As a result of these sweeping policy changes, and the hard work of our students and teachers, statewide reading proficiency rates have already begun to increase.

Building on that success, Governor Hochul will apply this model to the teaching of math, by proposing legislation to require the State Education Department (SED) to provide instructional best practices to school districts in the teaching of math, as well as guidance and resources to help educators select and implement curricula that align with state standards.

The State will also direct SUNY and CUNY to develop microcredentials in evidence-based math instruction to support New York's teachers and launch statewide professional learning opportunities in math instruction, including through regional hub pilots in New York's districts with the lowest math performance.

Together, these actions will support increased math learning for students, equip teachers across the state with evidence-based teaching techniques and materials, and create opportunities for professional learning.

## **Building on Back to Basics Literacy Through Support for In-Service Teachers**

New York school districts have aligned their literacy instruction with evidence-based methodologies and are working to ensure incoming teachers are learning to teach using Science of Reading best practices, through the state action plan created pursuant to New York's participation in the Hunt Institute's Path Forward program.

In addition to this training of pre-service teachers, Governor Hochul will ensure the state supports current classroom teachers as this shift is underway. To do so, New York will provide additional current teachers the opportunity to complete a Science of Reading SUNY or CUNY microcredential at no cost. Microcredentials are high-quality certification programs that offer rigorous instruction in educational best practices, via an accelerated course. By continuing to offer this instruction to additional teachers for free, this model will ensure broad participation by educators across the state and will help ensure that all children have access to quality reading instruction.

In addition, Governor Hochul will provide additional, targeted resources to some of New York's highest-need districts that are lagging behind in Science of Reading adoption. Starting with Rochester and Yonkers, Governor Hochul will establish a three-year pilot program between each school district and a New York State college or university with an educator preparation program, which will provide targeted in-service professional learning aligned with evidence-based reading instruction. By focusing on a discrete number of high-need districts, this pilot program will reach teachers where they are, help ensure all students are receiving high-quality instruction, and work to close stubborn literacy gaps.

## **Accelerating Learning with High-Impact Tutoring**

In addition to supporting evidence-based changes in the teaching and learning of literacy and math, Governor Hochul will also seek to accelerate student learning through targeted, high-impact tutoring. The state will support partnerships between high-need school districts and tutoring providers to ensure high-quality, individualized tutoring for students who deserve an extra boost. Tutoring opportunities will be limited to interested districts, and support both literacy and math. Evidence from other states and communities shows that this type of tutoring can be highly effective when implemented well, helping students overcome traditional barriers. Helping our students excel

in math and literacy will unlock a universe of opportunities for our kids and ensure our future workforce is equipped with the skills they need to succeed.

## **Creating a Sustainable Teacher Pipeline**

New York, like many other states, faces significant teacher diversity, recruitment, and retention challenges. It is estimated that New York will need as many as 180,000 new teachers over the next decade, including early childhood educators.

To address these challenges, Governor Hochul will invest in a set of innovative teacher recruitment and preparation initiatives. She will direct SED to establish a new program to create an accelerated teacher preparation pathway for career changers and individuals who want to become educators and already hold a bachelor's degree. This new pathway will require pre-service work in high-need classrooms, to count towards teacher certification, expediting the process of getting prospective teachers into classrooms where they are most needed.

To support our high school students in learning about and entering the teaching profession, New York will launch new P-TEACH programs, which will allow high school students to get a head start in learning about and preparing for careers in education by taking college courses in relevant subjects for credit. Additionally, the State will support the enhancement of TeachNY, an online resource which provides information, coaching and guidance for prospective teachers as they explore the profession and apply to educator preparation programs across the state. With additional resources, the program will aim to support more than 7,000 teacher recruits statewide in the next three years.

Finally, to consider longer-term solutions, Governor Hochul will establish a Task Force consisting of higher education, government, and nonprofit stakeholders, coordinated by the Rockefeller Institute of Government, to examine the scope and root causes of teacher shortages across the state, barriers to entry for incoming prospective teachers, and propose policy and regulatory solutions.

Through this broad package of reforms and programs, New York State is strategically identifying and removing many of the barriers that currently deter individuals from pursuing careers in teaching. Together these policies will result in thousands of additional high-quality teachers in New York's education ecosystem, supporting a brighter future for all students in New York.

## **Establishing the Empire AI Student Challenge**

The widespread use of AI, particularly by students and employers, has become an increasingly ubiquitous reality in both learning and professional environments. As students and teachers grapple with the uses and implications of new technology, many report feeling overwhelmed by and unprepared for use of the technology.

To address these anxieties, safely allow students to engage with the technology in positive ways, and equip young New Yorkers with the skills they need to harness future technologies, Governor Hochul will establish the inaugural Empire AI Student Challenge. Groups of students in grades K-12—with a sponsoring educator or expert—will work to identify a problem facing the public and find or create a solution using AI. Sponsoring educators and experts will be provided with access to training to learn how to teach the responsible use of AI to students and how to prepare for its potential future applications in the classroom and beyond.

The challenge will include on-site events at participating Empire AI member campuses, including SUNY and CUNY campuses, so students can learn from the cutting-edge work that is being done in the space right here in New York. This allows students the opportunity to unlock creative solutions to problems facing the public and learn how to responsibly use AI while supporting educators as they prepare to teach participants in our future workforce.

## **Increasing Our Understanding of Our School System and Programs to Support our Students**

New York's fragmented data systems make it hard to chart the trajectories of our students from early intervention and education to graduation and employment. To address this, New York has started to build out a secure statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS), a system meeting the highest standards of data privacy and security that connects records across early learning, K-12, postsecondary, and the workforce to understand the impact of supports, services, and opportunities on student journeys over time.

This year, Governor Hochul will support a targeted investment to expand the capacity to build and manage the system in a thoughtful way, and make sure data is made available to families. The State

will also establish a multi-agency governance board to ensure state agencies work together to guide and oversee the project, which will allow for the use of data across various agencies over time. This work will allow the State to gain a comprehensive understanding of how education, workforce, social services, and healthcare intersect in people's lives, ultimately resulting in better-designed programs and policies, more effectively allocated resources, and more opportunities for New Yorkers to succeed.

## **Getting Offline and Outside with Cooler Schoolyards**

Extreme heat caused by climate change is increasingly common and dangerous, particularly in urban settings. In fact, on New York's hottest days, New York City's built environment lifts temperatures 9.7 degrees hotter than surrounding areas.

Governor Hochul will build on her Unplug and Play campaign and her Extreme Heat Action Plan to launch a new funding opportunity in the Clean, Green Schools Program, that supports infrastructure and nature-based solutions to combat extreme heat in schoolyards. This investment will transform baking-hot asphalt playgrounds at public schools across the state into shaded, permeable green spaces that protect students and serve as cooling anchors for the surrounding neighborhood. The State will also create a broader, one-stop-shop online resource to provide information to communities on ways to combat extreme heat, including at schoolyards, to help keep New Yorkers safe and healthy.

## **Ensuring Indigenous Youth Have Access to Relevant, Quality Civics Instruction**

Indigenous students across New York State continue to experience educational disparities, including lower engagement in civic and community-based learning opportunities that support college, career, and civic readiness and engagement. To ensure that all school districts have the capacity and frameworks needed to engage Indigenous youth in school-based civics education, New York will expand the Indigenous Youth Service Project to serve additional school districts. This project, initially started in LaFayette, Silver Creek, and Niagara-Wheatfield, piloted an innovative service-learning approach that demonstrated that when Indigenous youth engage in service-learning

grounded in community values, they build academic confidence, civic skills, and leadership capacity. Expanding the project statewide will ensure that Indigenous students across all regions have the same opportunities for growth and success.

## **Elevating Excellence: Strengthening Mentoring Programs for Black and Latina Girls**

Governor Hochul is committed to supporting and uplifting all New York children so that they feel comfortable and empowered to take on leadership roles in their communities. To confront traditional barriers to mentoring and leadership resources for young Black and Latina women, Governor Hochul launched the Black Girls Mentoring Initiative and the Latina Mentoring Initiative (LMI). This year, she is reaffirming her support for these programs that empower participants to enhance their professional and personal skills while building confidence to become leaders among their peers. New York's diverse and expansive constituencies are what make us so special, and Governor Hochul will ensure that no child feels like they don't have the skills or access they need to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

## ***Connecting Higher Education and Opportunity***

### **Holding the Line on Costs and Promoting College Affordability at SUNY and CUNY**

Governor Hochul is championing affordability for New York students and families by holding the line on costs at New York's public colleges, freezing tuition for resident undergraduate students at SUNY State-operated campuses and CUNY senior colleges, and providing these institutions with additional operating aid so more New Yorkers can earn a degree without taking on crushing debt. By keeping tuition flat across SUNY and CUNY campuses, she is shifting the burden away from hardworking New York students and families.

College affordability is a core part of New York's economic strategy. This continuing freeze on tuition, combined with additional initiatives such as free community college for adult learners and previous expansions of access to the Tuition Assistance Program, helps working families keep up with the cost of living while preparing New Yorkers for well-paying jobs and careers.

## **Enhancing Affordability by Expanding SUNY and CUNY Reconnect for High-Demand Jobs**

The cost of a college degree should not stand in the way of adult learners pursuing new professional dreams in the high-demand fields that power our economy. SUNY and CUNY Reconnect, launched by Governor Hochul this year, provide adult learners the option to attend community college for free if they pursue a degree in a high-demand field such as healthcare, cybersecurity, or advanced manufacturing. The program has already yielded tremendous results; colleges have fielded 16,500 applications statewide this year and enrolled over 11,000 students in the program, successfully working to support our economy and strengthen our workforce in vital industries.

To continue this momentum, Governor Hochul will expand the program's list of eligible high-demand fields to include fields such as logistics, air traffic control and transportation, and emergency management. Given the pressing need to expand our nursing workforce, she will also expand the program to include adults attaining a nursing degree, even if they have already earned a college degree in a different field. By expanding the SUNY and CUNY Reconnect programs in high-demand areas, the State is supporting workforce development in high-demand fields, bolstering our economy by filling employment gaps, and creating economic mobility opportunities for New Yorkers across the state.

## **New York Career Connect Initiative: Better Preparing College Students for the Workforce across New York's Higher Education Systems**

As students graduate into dynamic job markets and industries, it is important to ensure that New York's higher education system provides exposure to workforce experience for all students before they graduate so they are well-prepared to compete for the jobs of the future. Governor Hochul will

take bold action to support SUNY and CUNY in providing thousands more career-aligned, relevant internship and experiential learning experiences to their students next year through the New York Career Connect initiative. Each system will build on its robust internship and experiential programs by integrating career counseling with academic advising, providing clear career maps for every major, and expanding opportunities with local businesses and public service placements.

By unifying these efforts under a statewide goal, the State will close workforce participation gaps, strengthen employer partnerships, and ensure that every graduate is career-ready—enhancing the value of a college degree and positioning New York as a national leader in workforce readiness.

## **Enhancing Student Borrower Support**

Federal changes to student loan policy are eliminating existing repayment options and imposing limits on student access to loans starting in 2026. The borrowing landscape has become overwhelmingly complex for both current and future borrowers. Governor Hochul will announce the expansion of services through the Education Debt Consumer Assistance Program (EDCAP) to help educate borrowers on ways to navigate the increasingly complicated policy context associated with student loans, to avoid and recover from delinquency.

EDCAP—New York’s first-in-the-nation student loan consumer assistance program, which has saved New Yorkers \$48 million since its inception in 2019—will launch an aggressive campaign to reach, assist, and educate thousands of delinquent or soon-to-be-delinquent student loan borrowers by partnering directly with colleges and universities, with a focus on public institutions, to deploy a robust triage model that combines webinars, self-paced tools, and one-on-one counseling.

The Department of Financial Services (DFS) will also develop a new education program to inform individuals about predatory lending and provide additional consumer outreach efforts. Together, these actions will help student borrowers comply with evolving rules, access support services to exit and recover from delinquency, and avoid predatory lending schemes.

## **Creating Emergency Aid Funds at All SUNY and CUNY Campuses to Keep Students Enrolled**

Unexpected events and emergencies, such as medical crises, can be very expensive, and force individuals to choose between paying their bills or covering their school tuition. To address this and help students stay in school to complete their degrees, SUNY and CUNY successfully piloted emergency aid programs during the pandemic that pooled funds together to be used for urgent, unanticipated expenses students may face such as housing loss, food insecurity, transportation needs, and medical expenses.

Drawing on the success of those pilot programs, Governor Hochul will direct SUNY and CUNY to develop standardized, system-wide policies governing emergency aid. By standardizing policies such as maximum grant funds, application processes and lifetime limits, the State will make it easier for students to stay in school and access critical services, both on campus and in the community, when they need them the most.

## **Supporting Former Foster Students to Attain a Degree through the Reconnect for Foster Scholars Program**

Nationally and in New York State, only approximately 3-4 percent of former foster youth finish a four-year degree, and only 2-6 percent obtain an associate's degree. Building on learnings and best practices from SUNY and CUNY Reconnect, New York will launch the Reconnect for Foster Scholars program to provide financial support to former foster youth who started earning a degree, took a break, and now wish to return to finish their undergraduate studies. By prioritizing the educational growth of former foster youth, the State is highlighting its commitment to all New Yorkers and creating opportunities for economic mobility.

## **Promoting Fairness and Affordability for Students by Reforming Tuition Refund Policies at SUNY**

Sometimes emergencies, life circumstances, or other exigencies can disrupt a student's progress

towards their degree. When that happens and a student is forced to unexpectedly leave or pause participation at a SUNY college, they should be able to get their money back for classes they could not take. To support student retention, minimize financial losses for students, and better reflect economic realities, Governor Hochul will direct SUNY to permit tuition liability to be waived over a broader period of time, understanding that emergencies can occur at any time. Additionally, SUNY will also allow for a longer phase-in of tuition liability for students who are funded through Pell Grants, TAP, or the GI Bill.

## **Reducing Burden in the Certificate of Residency Process for SUNY Community College and Early College Students**

Current law requires community college students who attend school outside of their local sponsorship area to obtain a certificate of residency from their home county within 30 days of classes starting, or they are charged a separate rate of tuition, which can be more than double the resident tuition rate. Similarly, high school students enrolled in dual enrollment programs at community colleges are also required to submit a certificate of residency before enrolling.

To cut red tape and prioritize college affordability, Governor Hochul will reform the certificate of residency submission process to simplify requirements and ensure students are not liable for large financial sums if their certificate of residency is only a few days or weeks late. These technical reforms will add to the State's track record of supporting policy that makes education more affordable and streamlines administrative processes so more people can access these quality resources.

## ***Promoting Youth Mental Health***

### **Equipping an Entire Generation with Mental Health First Aid Training**

When teens experience mental health difficulties, their first resort is often to reach out to their peers. Likewise, young people are often best positioned to identify peers who are facing challenges.

Research demonstrates that with training, they have the capacity to both identify and effectively respond to mental health challenges in ways that can improve and even save lives.

Continuing her multi-faceted approach to addressing the mental health crisis playing out among today's youth, Governor Hochul is taking first-in-the-nation action to make Teen Mental Health First Aid training available to all 10th graders across New York State. This training helps young people identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges in their friends and peers.

As part of this initiative, the State will also offer aligned training for adults who regularly interact with youth in schools and community programs to ensure they can assist young people in supporting their peers. This nationally recognized curriculum introduces common mental health challenges for youth, reviews typical adolescent development, and teaches a five-step action plan for how to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations.

By investing in our young people, New York will equip students with the basic skills needed to support themselves and their peers, drive lasting cultural change in addressing mental health stigma, and ensure students graduating high school have been equipped with crucial mental health skills.

## **Supporting Youth Mental Health for LGBTQ+ New Yorkers**

LGBTQ+ youth suffer from high rates of depression and anxiety. The federally funded 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline's specialized service for LGBTQ+ youth served between 50,000 and 60,000 young people per month, providing vital support that improved and saved lives before the current Administration chose to shutter it.

To continue serving young people in New York's LGBTQ+ community, Governor Hochul will direct the Office of Mental Health (OMH) to partner with a national crisis center to provide youth with access to trained crisis counselors who specialize in issues the LGBTQ+ community face. The State will also provide training to hundreds of local 988 crisis counselors to prepare them to handle specific concerns of LGBTQ+ youth.

Additionally, the State will announce a new legal hotline and resource website for the LGBTQ+ community, including information about legal rights, housing, healthcare, and other important

topics. By enhancing the systemic support infrastructure for the LGBTQ+ community, the State continues to demonstrate its staunch commitment to this community in the face of federal attacks.

## **Expanding Youth Safe Spaces by Designating Two Additional Community Organizations**

Non-clinical, safe environments where teens can discuss their mental health fill an important role in the larger mental health support landscape. Teens in New York cite a need for these spaces to help them access the support they want and require. New York will expand the Office of Mental Health's Youth Safe Spaces program by designating two additional community organizations to provide supportive, non-judgmental environments where young people can access mental wellness resources, foster positive peer relationships, and engage in non-clinical activities. By increasing access to these spaces, the State will provide more youth and families with direct access to important mental wellness resources.

## **Recognizing Schools Providing Strong Mental Health Supports**

New York will establish a new "Schools of Distinction in Supporting Strong Mental Health." designation to recognize and reward schools that have done an outstanding job providing strong, effective mental health supports, preventing crises, and reducing substance use. This award will set a recognized standard of excellence and go to schools that meet key benchmarks, such as conducting regular mental health screenings, promoting wellness and stigma reduction, and maintaining partnerships with community-based providers. Schools receiving this distinction will receive a financial award to recognize and further their work.

## **Hosting a Youth-Led Substance Use Prevention Symposium**

To better target New York's school-aged population and deter them from drug and substance use, the Office of Addiction Services and Support (OASAS) will host a youth-led substance use symposium in which students can learn from their peers about the dangers of substance use, ways to strengthen their

mental health, and how to access community-based resources. OASAS will also launch a youth-focused social media engagement strategy where youth-developed messages are featured on television, digital streaming services, and social media. By tailoring messaging for young people, by young people, the State will meet children where they are, in ways they can absorb and understand.

## **Ensuring All Child-Serving Clinicians in New York's Office of Mental Health Settings Are Trained in Evidence-Based Practices**

One in five youth and young adults experience mental health challenges. To ensure the care they receive is tailored, high-quality, and designed with their specific needs in mind, Governor Hochul will direct the Office of Mental Health (OMH) to publish a 10-year training roadmap for the implementation of evidence-based practices throughout New York State. This will ensure all child-serving clinicians in agency settings are trained in evidence-based practices and increase the standard of care that youth receive in New York. This roadmap will secure New York's role as a national leader in the promotion of evidence-based practices for youth mental health.

## **Opening up to 15 New Youth Clubhouses to Support Community-Based Recovery for Young People Suffering from a Substance Use Disorder**

Many of the young people who engage in substance misuse or suffer from a substance use disorder seek community and understanding as they recover and find their footing. Clubhouses offer non-clinical, community-building, life-skills training, recreational activities, and other support services that promote self-esteem, a sense of community, and overall well-being. To create greater access statewide, particularly in underserved counties, OASAS will open up to 15 new Youth Clubhouses, co-located with existing Recovery Community and Outreach Centers.

## **Establishing a Young Adult Recovery Residence for Individuals Recovering from Opioid Addiction**

Access to safe housing is one of the top factors that can positively impact substance use disorder and opioid recovery at any age. To build on Governor Hochul's commitment to ensuring the health and safety of our young people, she will direct OASAS to establish the state's first Young Adult Recovery Residence. This initiative will provide housing and services for up to 35 young adults with substance use disorder and opioid addiction. Wrap-around recovery services, including housing, are essential to helping individuals reach and maintain their recovery goals, and live a healthy lifestyle.

## **Scaling Mental Health Supports for Indigenous Youth**

Tribal youth experience disproportionately high rates of depression, anxiety, substance use, and suicide, reflecting the impacts of historical trauma, ongoing discrimination, and limited access to mental health services that reflect Indigenous cultures and values. To improve mental health outcomes and strengthen cultural support for Indigenous students, New York State will partner with all Tribal Nations to support Indigenous students' mental health in ways reflecting their cultures and communities. Building on the Indigenous Mental Wellbeing Pilot Program, the State will expand the use of transitional support workers and peer advocates to all Tribal Nations and Indigenous-serving school districts with a government-to-government relationship with the State. The initiative also stands up an Indigenous School Mental Health Workforce Center to support SUNY students seeking careers in school-based mental health.

## ***Safeguarding Kids Online***

## **Safe By Design: Creating Safer Digital Environments for Kids**

Governor Hochul has taken nation-leading actions to protect our children from harm online. The SAFE for Kids Act, signed into law in 2024, represents the nation's most thoughtful policy

prescription to curb the negative influence addictive social media features have on youth mental health. The SAFE for Kids Act also set important national precedents about enhanced age verification and required that social media companies use strong processes to identify and subsequently restrict certain features on child accounts. The Governor has also worked to ban smartphones in schools, set first-in-the-nation safeguards for AI chatbots posing as friends, outlaw AI-generated child sexual abuse material, enact social media warning labels, and invest in offline spaces where kids can thrive.

Building on these actions, Governor Hochul will take bold steps to protect children from online predators, scammers and harmful AI chatbots integrated on online platforms and ensure online platforms prioritize kids' safety over profit.

Governor Hochul will pursue legislation that expands age verification requirements beyond social media platforms to online game platforms, establishes new safety and child-oriented design features to help shield children from online harms, vests greater control in parents, and enhances privacy standards on platforms. Her proposal will:

- Restrict the use of integrated AI chatbot features on social media by children.
- Limit direct messages from non-connections to minor accounts.
- Default children to the highest privacy settings on covered platforms, including restrictions on real-time location sharing data.
- Implement common-sense parental controls over a child's ability to make or receive payments on online platforms.

These actions, paired with the other nation-leading efforts already underway, highlight New York's commitment to ensuring the safety of our children. By enforcing these thoughtful, effective, and potentially life-saving policies, New York is one step closer to ensuring that our children are protected from abuse and exploitation online.

## **Ensuring Fair Play in Online Betting and Limiting Access for Young People**

As online sports betting becomes immensely popular, and new, more accessible online gambling

platforms become more sophisticated, it is essential to ensure that young people are protected from the harmful effects of gamified sports betting. Governor Hochul will direct the Gaming Commission to explore effective ways to ensure young people are not illegally downloading betting apps, creating accounts, or using the accounts of others, including the use of biometric approaches. These actions will protect young people from the harms of online betting, which include significant financial loss and addictive behavior.

## **Promoting Responsible Digital Citizenship: Supporting Distraction-Free Schools and Student Mental Health**

Building on the success of her nation-leading distraction-free schools policy, the Governor will direct SED to develop a suite of resources for students, teachers, and parents to support responsible technology use and good digital citizenship. Complementing the recent work by OMH in sharing best practices for safe social media usage, these resources will help students understand why devices can impact focus and learning, how to manage social media and AI responsibly, and how to protect their mental health.

The resources will include evidence-based lessons on safe online behavior for students in grades K-12 (including how to manage privacy, digital footprints, cyberbullying, and healthy device habits), grade-level teacher guides on how to promote responsible technology use, regional teacher trainings aligned with distraction free school policies, and toolkits and webinars for parents to reinforce responsible technology and device use at home. By reiterating the importance of digital responsibility, these resources promote online safety, enhance responsible technology use learning, and equip students and educators with resources to protect the mental health of our students.



## Chapter 8: Keeping New Yorkers Healthy

Since taking office, Governor Hochul has made historic investments in New York's healthcare system. Where the federal government has prioritized draconian cuts that threaten the most vulnerable New Yorkers, Governor Hochul has invested billions to strengthen and stabilize health systems, expand coverage, lower the consumer cost of care, bolster the health workforce, and drive long-term transformational change within the health sector.

The Governor's unwavering commitment to prioritizing the health of all New Yorkers is reflected in transformational investments reaching every community across the state. Since taking office, Governor Hochul has:

- Banned insulin co-pays for State-regulated insurance plans.
- Signed legislation to prevent medical debt from negatively impacting New Yorkers' access to credit and enacted new consumer protections to support lower-income patients.
- Established the nation's first-ever prenatal leave policy, allowing workers the ability to take paid leave for any pregnancy-related medical appointments.
- Invested \$10 billion to build the healthcare workforce, including more than \$2 billion in bonuses paid to more than 800,000 health and mental hygiene workers.
- Provided \$9 billion in Medicaid rate increases to support providers and expand access for members.
- Provided more than \$4 billion in capital to support key healthcare infrastructure projects.
- Provided \$13.6 billion in additional operating funding to safety-net hospitals.

Central to these investments has been the Healthcare Safety Net Transformation Program, which the Governor launched in 2024 to drive partnerships that improve the resilience and sustainability of safety-net hospitals and expand access to high-quality care.

Governor Hochul has also worked to deliver critical new funding and services, including securing the nation's largest investment in health-related social needs through the Medicaid Section 1115

Demonstration Waiver, which includes a three-year \$7.5 billion investment, nearly \$6 billion of which is federal funding. In addition, the Governor has made key investments in pregnancy care for New Yorkers through expanded coverage, new Medicaid benefits for pregnant people, and incentives to improve overall maternal health quality and outcomes.

Coverage, however, means little without access and the Governor has invested heavily to ensure that care is both available and affordable. She has made major investments in expanding the workforce, with nearly \$700 million in 1115 waiver workforce programs.

Despite the federal government's rejection of widely accepted science, Governor Hochul has remained focused on smart, evidence-based policymaking. She established the Future of Health Care Commission to identify strategies to ensure the long-term resilience of New York's healthcare system and develop forward-thinking proposals that ensure New York's health system continues to evolve to meet the rapidly changing landscape and support the health of all New Yorkers.

## ***Strengthening the Healthcare Delivery System***

### **Expanding the Safety Net Transformation Program**

Safety-net hospitals care for the most vulnerable New Yorkers but face serious challenges in maintaining financial resilience and stability. To address this, Governor Hochul established the Safety Net Transformation Program, providing financial support and regulatory flexibility to encourage strategic partnerships that strengthen these hospitals. Since the program's passage, Governor Hochul has awarded more than \$4.6 billion to support fourteen partnerships across the state.

This year, Governor Hochul will provide additional funding to continue supporting new projects under the program, which will allow it to reach more of the state's struggling safety-net hospitals. Furthermore, additional funding will allow support for innovative projects, such as including partnerships that focus on regional planning to improve coordination of care and reduce duplication of healthcare services, and partnerships that utilize AI to improve efficiency and quality of care.

## **Expanding the Use of Artificial Intelligence Technology in Healthcare Safely and Equitably**

The use of AI in healthcare is rapidly advancing with promises to improve operational efficiency and patient care if carefully adopted. It is essential to coordinate AI advancement within the healthcare delivery system in a way that promotes greater access, quality, and equity in care delivery at a lower cost for all patients.

Governor Hochul will direct the Department of Health (DOH) to establish a consortium of healthcare and AI experts to share data and best practices and strengthen cross-sector collaboration around building, testing, and deploying safe and effective AI tools. To ensure equitable access, Governor Hochul will incentivize partnerships between safety-net hospitals and other healthcare partners to implement AI solutions that improve quality of care and strengthen operations. In addition, the State will develop systems to evaluate and launch best-in-class AI tools within DOH, the Medicaid program, and New York's Office of the Medicaid Inspector General (OMIG) to strengthen program integrity.

## **Strengthening Oversight of Healthcare Transactions**

Since 2023, the New York Material Transactions Law requires healthcare entities to report transactions that increase revenues by \$25 million or more. This reporting is the first step to understanding the expected and initial impact of these private transactions on cost, quality, access, equity and competition in the New York healthcare delivery system.

To strengthen oversight of these entities, Governor Hochul will expand this law to require ongoing reporting on the actual impact of closed material transactions, along with external reviews for high cost, high impact transactions. These changes will ensure that New Yorkers can continue to access affordable, high-quality, and equitable care for the long term.

## **Enabling Transformation of the Healthcare Delivery System**

Healthcare providers are required to follow regulatory requirements, including Certificate of Need

(CON), to receive approval for certain healthcare projects. While it is a critical process, it can be time-intensive for both providers and DOH. Governor Hochul has already made progress by streamlining the application and review process for certain projects and significantly raising the thresholds that qualify a CON application for a more detailed review.

Additional improvements can further improve the system and reduce burden. Governor Hochul will direct DOH to make the CON process more efficient and targeted, to improve the experience of providers and expedite important healthcare projects across the state.

## *Empowering the Healthcare Workforce*

### **Removing Unnecessary Restrictions on Healthcare Workers**

Healthcare workforce shortages limit and delay patient access to care, from registered nurses and physicians to nursing assistants. This issue is compounded by New York State law, which often unnecessarily restricts which services healthcare workers may perform within their licensed scope of practice. This means more advanced clinicians spend their time performing tasks that could be done by lower-level staff, and patients have fewer options for basic services.

Governor Hochul will propose legislation to expand scope of practice for several critical workers to expand access for patients, including allowing certified nursing assistants to administer medication in nursing homes, physician assistants with sufficient training to practice independently, and medical assistants to administer vaccinations. Finally, Governor Hochul will change state law to allow DOH to oversee and make additional decisions about licensed healthcare professionals' scope of practice.

### **Reducing Reliance on Temporary Staff to Stabilize the Healthcare Workforce**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, reliance on temporary staff and traveling nurses skyrocketed. Years after the height of the pandemic, this reliance continues—in 2024, healthcare facilities paid temporary staffing agencies more than \$2.6 billion, and the agencies kept \$1 billion of that in profits.

These are not workers coming on temporary assignment from other states; New York residents make up 72 percent of the temporary workforce, and the majority of these New York residents permanently live within 25 miles of their “temporary” work location.

Governor Hochul will introduce legislation to ensure healthcare dollars are supporting the delivery of care. In addition, the Governor will direct DOH to develop guidance and share best practices to ensure healthcare organizations have the information they need to secure temporary staff.

## **Expanding Healthcare Access through Workforce Investments**

While New York State has made significant strides in expanding healthcare coverage, statewide workforce shortages in the health sector mean that even those with coverage may struggle to get the care they need. To address this, New York launched two initiatives through its federal 1115 waiver aimed at bolstering the healthcare workforce in underserved areas. In late 2024, the State launched the Career Pathways Training (CPT) Program, with \$646 million in federal funding for tuition, textbooks, and education and career supports for health, behavioral health, and social care workers who make a three-year commitment to serving Medicaid members. Last year, New York also launched the Health Care Access Loan Repayment Program (HEALR), which will provide loan payments for high-need titles serving Medicaid members.

To date, the CPT program has already recruited nearly 12,000 participants. This year, the program will graduate thousands of new nurses, physician assistants, social workers, community health workers, and other critically needed health titles into the workforce. This spring, the HEALR program will award nearly \$50 million in loan repayment for psychiatrists, primary care physicians, dentists, nurse practitioners, and pediatric clinical nurse specialists who make a four-year commitment to serving Medicaid members. Taken together, these two initiatives represent a nearly \$700 million investment in strengthening New York’s health workforce and ensuring that New Yorkers have timely access to the care they need.

## ***Improving Healthcare Coverage, Access, and Affordability***

### **Protecting and Expanding Access to Quality, Affordable Health Coverage**

Despite New York having achieved one of the lowest uninsured rates in the nation, recent federal actions threaten the continued affordability and accessibility of health coverage in the state. Federal cuts to New York's Essential Plan total \$7.5 billion, more than half of the program's annual funding, endangering the program's continued viability. The expiration of federal enhanced premium tax credits means that 140,000 New Yorkers are paying 40 percent more for premiums in 2026. Taken together, these federal policies are poised to roll back more than a decade of progress in bringing affordable health coverage to New Yorkers.

To safeguard hard-won gains, Governor Hochul will direct the Department of Health to take steps to protect and strengthen existing coverage and explore new coverage options. To mitigate coverage losses, Governor Hochul directed DOH to submit an application to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to return the Essential Plan to a Basic Health Program, a move that will preserve coverage for 1.3 million New Yorkers for whom the premium-free program is a critical lifeline. For the roughly 450,000 New Yorkers who will lose their current Essential Plan coverage in this transition, Governor Hochul will direct DOH to negotiate with the federal government to develop affordable coverage options to ensure continued access to affordable healthcare for those impacted by federal cuts.

### **Leveraging New York's Purchasing Power to Drive Down Drug Costs**

Since the 2023 transition of New York's Medicaid pharmacy benefit to the streamlined NYRx program, which garnered the state more than \$600 million in new drug rebates, New York has become a nation-leader in pharmacy benefit management and reform. However, given the state's size and market share, New York's supplemental rebates—the State-negotiated discounts Medicaid receives on top of federally-mandated rebates—are only average by national standards, while overall drug prices nationwide continue to soar.

To address stubbornly rising pharmaceutical prices and leverage New York's purchasing power, Governor Hochul will direct DOH to identify and target specific classes of high-cost drugs for direct negotiations with manufacturers to achieve better discounts for the State. The move will drive significant savings for the Medicaid program at a time of significant cost pressures arising from federal cuts, while also laying the groundwork for future initiatives to lower pharmaceutical prices statewide.

## **Reforming Prior Authorizations to Improve Patient Care**

New Yorkers seeking timely medical care too often face delays, denials, or disruptions due to opaque insurance review processes—most notably, prior authorizations. These processes require healthcare providers to obtain approval from insurers before delivering certain treatments, tests, or prescribing medications. While well-intended to control costs and ensure appropriate care, prior authorization has increasingly become a barrier to treatment.

Governor Hochul will expand healthcare coverage protections for New Yorkers by reforming and creating more transparency in the prior authorization review process. Specifically, she will:

- Require formularies—the lists of medications covered by health insurance plans—to be posted not just publicly but clearly via a standard, accessible format.
- Ensure prior authorizations for designated chronic conditions remain valid longer, so time isn't wasted on unnecessary reviews for ongoing, stable treatments.
- Expand “continuity of care”—the period insurers must cover out-of-network treatment for new patients—from 60 days for life-threatening conditions or late-stage pregnancy to 90 days for all health conditions and the full postpartum period.
- Expand the data health insurers must report on their claims processes, including how often claims are subject to prior authorization and how often those requests are denied.
- Launch a public education campaign highlighting resources that help both consumers and providers navigate insurance challenges.

These reforms will improve access to care by removing unnecessary administrative burdens on providers and making sure critical care is neither delayed nor denied.

## **Increasing Access to Medical Care for Injured Workers**

New York is one of only a handful of states that requires special authorization for healthcare providers treating workers' compensation claimants. Only about 10 percent of eligible providers have gone through this authorization process, forcing injured workers to wait for appointments or travel long distances to receive care.

New Yorkers who get hurt at work should be able to see the doctors they trust, get healthy, and get back to work. While ensuring that qualified doctors are serving patients, Governor Hochul will eliminate this cumbersome and outdated authorization process, allowing any eligible licensed medical provider in good standing to treat workers' compensation claimants if they choose. Cutting this red tape will open the door to thousands more primary care providers and specialists who can help people heal and get back to work faster.

## ***Investing in Older Adults***

### **Assisting Older Adults to Age in Place**

New York ranks as the fourth oldest state in the nation, with 4.6 million individuals aged 60 or older. By 2030, this population is expected to reach 5.4 million, with many older adults facing challenges related to mobility, daily living activities, and chronic health conditions. New York State offers a variety of preventive services to help older adults age safely and healthily in their homes, delaying the need for more costly supports and services. Non-medical in-home services such as home-delivered meals, personal care, or transportation services delay the need for institutional care, reduce economic pressures on older adults, improve health outcomes, and reduce social isolation.

To allow more older New Yorkers to age in their homes, the Governor will increase investments in proven models of care for preventive home and community-based services. First, the Governor will increase investments in Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCS), which are housing developments or neighborhoods with large populations of older adults where community providers offer supportive services for residents, such as healthcare navigation and case management. The

Governor will also renew a fiscal year 2026 \$35 million investment to reduce waitlists for non-medical in-home services such as personal care, case management, home delivered and congregate meals, and transportation. Finally, Governor Hochul is pleased to announce the launch of the CAPABLE program, or Community Aging in Place – Advancing Better Living for Elders. Through this program, 2,600 older adults will receive in-home visits providing nursing, occupational therapy, and handy worker services.

## **Improving Access to End-of-Life Care**

New York State is ranked 50th among all states in the proportion of Medicare enrollees that received hospice services prior to death. The low hospice utilization rate persists despite having a relatively older population, higher numbers of physicians, more skilled nursing facility beds, and fewer for-profit hospitals compared to other states.

To encourage appropriate use of hospice and palliative care, the Governor will direct the Department of Health to launch an educational awareness initiative to inform clinical providers and staff on options for community-based palliative care, hospice care, and the importance of advance care planning.

## **Protecting Older Adults from Abuse, Scams, and Fraud**

Elder abuse (physical, social, financial, or sexual abuse or neglect) impacts many adults aged 60 and older in New York State. It is estimated that 300,000 older New Yorkers are victimized annually. Meanwhile, adults over the age of 60 are especially targeted for financial scams and fraud. In 2024, seniors over 60 years of age lost \$4.8 billion to scams, while those aged 50-59 lost \$2.5 billion, according to a recent report released by the FBI.

To expand efforts to protect older adults from abuse, scams, and fraud, Governor Hochul will direct the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) to create comprehensive virtual elder abuse prevention and response training modules that are free of charge and accessible to the public.

## **Creating a One-Stop Shop for Benefits for Older New Yorkers**

New York State has a strong existing network of services and benefits to support its rapidly aging population. Even so, older New Yorkers face significant challenges with understanding eligibility for benefits and accessing the care and services they need to thrive.

To address this, the Governor will launch a short term, multi-agency council to identify all benefits across agencies that older adults may be eligible for, such as Veteran's benefits, local and state tax reduction benefits, and benefits related to nutrition, prescriptions, energy bills, medical care, and more. The council will develop a comprehensive list of what's available, and present recommendations to the Governor on options for a "one-stop shop" to allow New Yorkers to pre-screen themselves and identify what they may be eligible to apply for. In addition, the council will explore the option of a universal benefits application.

## ***Improving Equity in Public Health***

### **Protecting Immunization Access**

New York's immunization policies rely on federal vaccine schedules that, under the current administration, are becoming less and less anchored in science. This creates uncertainty for schools, healthcare providers, and New Yorkers in general; it also puts the health of our communities at risk and, in some cases, increases patient costs.

To keep New Yorkers safe and keep money in their pockets, Governor Hochul will advance legislation to ensure New York can set its own immunization standards based on accepted medical science and public health needs. The proposal will authorize the Commissioner of Health, in consultation with recognized medical organizations, to establish immunization requirements that guide school eligibility, clinical practice, and insurance coverage. This will provide clarity for providers and insurers, protect access to vaccines, and strengthen public health statewide.

## **Improving Vital Records Access**

New York State maintains millions of vital records dating back to the 1800s, including birth, death, marriage, and divorce certificates, all requiring indefinite preservation and access. However, the current system for retrieving these records is out-of-date and inefficient, creating unacceptable delays and frustration for thousands of New Yorkers seeking their own records. Outdated manual processes, and aging paper-based storage systems have created a mounting backlog that can leave individual customers waiting over five months for critical documents needed for passports, legal proceedings, benefits enrollment, and family research.

Governor Hochul will make long overdue technological improvements to the vital records system, launching an effort to digitize archival records for genealogical requests. This digitization program will convert historical birth, death and marriage certificates into electronic, searchable formats. Digitized vital records are significantly easier to search, retrieve, issue to requestors and protect from physical deterioration or disaster loss. This will help address the current two-year backlog of over 12,000 genealogical records requests.

In addition, DOH will tackle the living records request backlog, and improve operational efficiency for future requests. This will directly reduce customer complaints related to long wait times and enhance customer service with more timely communication and responses.

## **Strengthening Cardiac Emergency Readiness across New York State**

Sudden cardiac arrest remains a leading cause of death in New York, and survival often depends on whether help arrives in the first critical minutes. While progress has been made in schools and youth programs, many communities still lack widespread CPR training and easy access to automated external defibrillators (AEDs). Governor Hochul will protect New Yorkers by implementing a multi-faceted proposal that equips communities around the state with the tools they need to effectively respond to cardiac emergencies and save lives.

The Governor's plan will significantly strengthen cardiac emergency readiness statewide by building on a successful model pioneered at the University at Buffalo to establish regional training hubs and ensure communities know how to use AEDs and support new, scalable approaches to hands-only

CPR education, focused on simple chest-compression techniques for bystanders.

The Governor will also update the law to dispense with outdated red tape restrictions on the installation of fully automated AEDs and create New York's first statewide AED registry. This registry will map the precise location of every AED across the state, enabling emergency dispatchers to direct bystanders to the nearest device during cardiac events. The registry can be accessible to the public through a mobile application, so every New Yorker can access their nearest AED if needed. The Governor will also make investments in self-directed CPR training kiosks and AED placements across the state.

## **Modernizing Pain Management Guidance and Care**

New York has made significant progress in reducing overdose deaths, with provisional data showing a roughly 28 percent decline in 2024 compared to 2023—the lowest level since before the pandemic. Despite this progress, New Yorkers continue to lose their lives to opioid addiction. The State's progress reflects expanded harm reduction efforts, including broader access to naloxone and drug testing strips, and increased investment in prevention, treatment, and recovery services.

The healthcare system can play an important role by standardizing pain management approaches and updating clinical approaches. Governor Hochul will direct DOH to support providers as they balance effective pain relief with patient safety and ever-evolving standards of care. DOH will develop a comprehensive Pain Management and Drug Control Strategy focused on preventing opioid misuse and treatment, strengthening prescription oversight, and promoting best practices in pain management across the healthcare continuum.

## **Protecting Summer Campers from Extreme Weather Threats**

Summer camps should be places of joy and community, helping young New Yorkers create lifelong memories and friendship. But as extreme weather events become more frequent and severe, summer camps across the state and country face growing risks from flooding, extreme heat, and other climate-related hazards that threaten the safety of children and staff.

In partnership with the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES) and local health departments, Governor Hochul will direct DOH to strengthen oversight and preparedness requirements for camps at greatest risk, including those located in FEMA-designated floodplains. This effort will help camps to incorporate extreme weather readiness into their annual safety plans and ensure clear evacuation, sheltering, and communication protocols are in place. The State will also issue updated guidance and training to support local health departments in reviewing and enforcing these requirements. By improving preparedness before emergencies occur, New York will better protect children and ensure families can trust that summer camps are equipped to respond to extreme weather events.



## Chapter 9: Securing New York's Energy Future

Governor Hochul has fundamentally rewritten the playbook for energy in the Empire State. Rather than relying on the strategies of the past, New York is executing a modern strategy defined by historic action: cutting red tape, unlocking the potential of advanced nuclear technology, and fortifying our grid against modern threats.

Reliability, affordability, and sustainability guide every energy decision this administration makes. By rejecting the false choice between economic growth and clean air and water, the Governor has secured New York's status as a national leader while ensuring the lights stay on and costs remain within reach for working families. From championing new reliable energy sources to shoring up the security of our grid, Governor Hochul has diversified our generation options, created thousands of high-paying union jobs, and worked to make energy more affordable for all New Yorkers. Governor Hochul has:

- Released the 2025 State Energy Plan, a realistic roadmap that prioritizes reliability for every-day New Yorkers above all else. Refusing to risk rolling blackouts or gas outages, this Plan embraces an “all-of-the-above” strategy that leverages hydropower, wind, solar, and firm zero-emission resources like nuclear to anchor the grid as demand grows.
- Kick-started a nuclear renaissance to ensure Upstate New York has the carbon-free baseload needed to support industrial growth. The Governor directed the New York Power Authority (NYPA) to develop one gigawatt of zero-emission advanced nuclear power, reaffirming that nuclear power is essential to a reliable, 24/7 clean grid.
- Rebuilt the grid’s physical backbone by advancing massive transmission projects that unblock the flow of clean energy. This includes the Champlain Hudson Power Express (CHPE), on track for completion in mid-2026, that will deliver 1,250 megawatts of Canadian hydropower directly to New York City.
- Reached and exceeded the State’s solar goals. New York achieved its 2025 goal of installing six gigawatts of distributed solar a full year ahead of schedule and now stands as the top community solar market in the United States.

- Persevered to launch the American offshore wind industry. New York is now operating the nation's first utility-scale offshore wind farm, South Fork Wind. The State has also streamlined permitting by creating a "one-stop shop" for renewable energy and electric transmission siting that accelerates project approvals and cut red tape and has supercharged the pace of moving critical generation projects from a contract on paper to construction on the ground. Since 2021, 31 large-scale solar and wind projects have been permitted, representing more than 4.2 gigawatts of clean energy—enough to power roughly 1.5 million homes.

New York's grid is already among the cleanest in the country. Governor Hochul is proving to the nation that an energy transition can be reliable, affordable, and achievable. By treating energy policy as economic policy, the Governor is ensuring that decades from now, New Yorkers will inherit a stronger, cleaner, and more secure energy future.

## **Establishing a Nuclear Reliability Backbone for a Zero-Emission Grid**

As New York transitions to a zero-emission electric grid, the State must ensure reliable and cost-effective baseload power to keep homes, businesses, and critical infrastructure running at all hours. Governor Hochul will ensure that New York State leads in the race to harness safe and reliable advanced nuclear energy to power homes and businesses with zero-emission electricity for generations to come.

To catalyze progress towards those goals, the Governor will advance a new initiative, the Nuclear Reliability Backbone, directing state agencies to establish a clear pathway for additional advanced nuclear generation to support grid reliability. The Nuclear Reliability Backbone will be developed by a new Department of Public Service (DPS) process to consider, review, and facilitate a cost-effective pathway to four gigawatts of new nuclear energy that will combine with existing nuclear generation and the New York Power Authority's (NYPA) previously announced one gigawatt project, to create an 8.4 gigawatt "backbone" of reliable energy for New Yorkers.

This effort will provide firm, clean power that complements renewable energy resources and reduces reliance on fossil fuel generation. By creating a stable foundation of always-on energy, the Backbone will allow renewable resources to operate more efficiently and flexibly. Together, these actions will support a resilient, flexible, and zero-emission grid that meets New York's growing energy needs.

## **Ensuring New York's Nuclear Power Future is Built By and For New Yorkers**

As New York expands advanced nuclear energy, the State must ensure that New Yorkers benefit from these jobs and investments, including making sure New Yorkers are prepared to build, operate, and sustain this emerging industry. Governor Hochul will launch NextGen Nuclear New York to develop a skilled, in-state nuclear workforce through coordinated education and training pathways. The initiative will expand partnerships across K–12 schools, higher education institutions, labor organizations, and training programs to align curricula, credentials, and career pathways with industry needs. It will also support workforce transitions for existing energy workers and increase public awareness of nuclear career opportunities. By investing in people and skills, New York will ensure its nuclear future is powered by New Yorkers, for New Yorkers.

## **Supporting Solar Energy in Public Schools by Aligning State Building Aid with Climate Goals**

New York's thousands of public schools consume substantial energy, and can and should play an important role in advancing clean energy priorities while also providing healthier learning environments for students. Looking toward a more sustainable future, many school districts are choosing to invest in solar and other renewable energy systems, which will support the state's transition long-term. However, current Building Aid rules can limit their ability to undertake these crucial projects. Governor Hochul will update how State Building Aid is applied so school districts have greater flexibility to install the most effective renewable energy systems, including ground-mounted solar where appropriate. This change will make it easier for schools to reduce energy costs, cut emissions, and invest in cleaner infrastructure without increasing overall Building Aid.

## **Establishing a Sales Tax Exemption for Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Stations**

As New York continues to work towards a greener, cleaner future, electric vehicles (EV) play an important role in weaning New Yorkers' reliance on polluting and dangerous fuels. Governor Hochul has led the way in facilitating this transition by significantly building out the state's EV

charging infrastructure, deploying 15,000 chargers at more than 4,000 locations. This has resulted in nearly 187,000 EVs in New York. To further incentivize the installation of EV charging stations for public use, Governor Hochul will support legislation to establish a sales tax exemption on the retail sale of electricity used to recharge an electric vehicle by a commercial EV charging station. By encouraging additional charging options, Governor Hochul is removing historic barriers that prevent EV uptake and bringing New York one step closer to realizing its clean energy goals.

## **Supporting Farms through the Sun and Soil Program**

As New York expands clean energy generation, the State must ensure that renewable development and working farmland can coexist and complement one another. As farmers face rising operating costs, the transition to a clean energy economy presents opportunities to help farms diversify their revenues as they continue to operate and manage their valued farming activity.

Governor Hochul will introduce the Sun and Soil Program to increase options for farmers to benefit from the integration of solar energy development on their land while maintaining valuable land assets. The program builds on existing State-supported research and demonstration projects that show how solar panels can be co-located with active farming, such as grazing and crop production, allowing farms to generate clean energy while keeping land in agricultural use. Identifying avenues to capitalize on solar energy development while supporting continued use of productive farmland will help farmers financially and support the resiliency of their business.

The program will be advised by—and inform efforts of—the State’s Agricultural Technical Working Group (ATWG) and will identify responsible solar development practices that support New York State’s agricultural operations, lands, farmers, and communities. The ATWG, led by the New York State Energy Resource and Development Authority (NYSERDA) in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and Markets, includes agricultural land and farmer organizations, solar developers and operators, local government officials, academic experts, and additional non-governmental organizations and state agencies. By advancing research, demonstration projects, and partnerships between farmers and renewable energy developers, Sun and Soil strengthens rural economies by supporting opportunities for both clean energy growth and sustained use of productive farmland for agricultural production.

## **Protecting Our Energy Grid from Cyber Threats**

As New York modernizes its electric grid and brings more clean energy resources online, we must protect this vital asset from cyber threats that could put our power and safety at risk. Building on nation-leading actions already underway, Governor Hochul will strengthen protections for New York's electric grid. This effort will expand enforceable cybersecurity standards beyond traditional information technology to include the operational technology that controls power generation, transmission, and distribution, while also addressing the growing cybersecurity risks. These actions will reduce the risk of disruption, protect ratepayers from costly outages, and ensure New York's evolving energy system remains resilient, reliable, and secure.



# Chapter 10: Protecting New York's Environment

For decades, New York has led the nation in environmental protection. From pioneering policy to groundbreaking investments, the State has consistently demonstrated a commitment to our vibrant ecosystems and a greener future. Today, under Governor Hochul's leadership, New York is once again setting the standard by embracing an ambitious, transformative vision for building a clean, resilient, and sustainable future.

By investing in resiliency infrastructure, addressing flood mitigation, and preserving thousands of acres of forests and wetlands, Governor Hochul is fortifying New York's resilience against extreme weather. These strategic investments in our parks and natural resources ensure that every community has access to clean air and water, securing a greener, more sustainable future for generations to come.

The Governor has made tremendous leaps forward, transforming ideas into tangible results. Since taking office, she has:

- Signed the groundbreaking Climate Superfund, which shifts the financial burden of climate adaptation from taxpayers to fossil fuel companies.
- Delivered a record \$3.8 billion in the last fiscal year for investments in local water infrastructure, helping ensure access to clean drinking water and bolster flood resilience.
- Secured historic funding for the Environmental Protection Fund, reaching a record \$425 million to support protecting our forests and farmland protection, investing in local parks, supporting water quality, and more.
- Safeguarded additional acres of wetland habitat and launched the 25 Million Trees initiative, which has already begun distributing thousands of trees to municipalities to mitigate urban heat and restore ecosystems.
- Started the Get Offline, Get Outside campaign encouraging New Yorkers to get off social media and take advantage of the outdoors, including our more than 250 state parks, historic sites, and more.

- Launched the \$1 billion Sustainable Future Program, which is the largest single climate investment in state history, dedicating funds to decarbonize facilities across the state, help New Yorkers install heat pumps, and decarbonize the transportation sector and university campuses.
- Advanced the \$4.2 billion Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act, which is deploying funding across the entire state, helping make communities more resilient to extreme weather events, improving our state parks, investing in clean water, and deploying zero emission school buses.

As New York enters 2026, Governor Hochul's environmental agenda remains clear: protect our natural resources, hold polluters accountable, and build more resilient communities.

## **Investing in the Environmental Protection Fund to Safeguard Our Natural Resources**

As a cornerstone of the State's conservation efforts, the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) provides resources across the state to help safeguard our water and natural resources, preserve vital farmland and forests, and invest in climate action. These investments also play an important role in expanding public access and stewardship for outdoor spaces, from the High Peaks of the Adirondacks to the shorelines of Long Island. Through its diverse funding and programming, the EPF also supports New York's zoos, botanical gardens, and aquariums, while establishing municipal parks and advancing environmental justice in overburdened communities.

Governor Hochul is reaffirming New York's commitment to environmental leadership by proposing \$425 million in funding for the EPF. This historic investment reinforces the state's role as a national leader in conservation and environmental protection, helping preserve New York's environment for generations to come.

## **Continuing Our Commitment to Green, Resilient Communities**

As extreme rainfall and flooding place growing strains on New York's cities and towns, many communities still rely on outdated stormwater systems, which move water quickly but fail to reduce

long-term risk. Governor Hochul will continue investments to create green, resilient communities by expanding the use of nature-based infrastructure that absorbs stormwater, reduces flooding, and cools neighborhoods during extreme heat.

Building on prior success, the State will advance another round of the highly in-demand Green Resiliency Grant program to help municipalities replace hard surfaces with permeable landscapes, trees, and green systems that manage water where it falls. These projects will reduce nuisance flooding, protect water quality, and improve public spaces in dense urban areas and small cities alike. Governor Hochul has previously awarded \$120 million in these grants, including grants that have supported the NYCHA Clinton Houses through green infrastructure and ensuring equitable access to addressing flooding. By investing in green infrastructure, New York will make communities safer, healthier, and more resilient while restoring natural systems that support long-term environmental and economic stability.

## **Mitigating Flood Risk Through FloodSafe NY**

As climate change increases the frequency of flooding across New York, many communities have streams and watersheds that have not been studied for flood risk, limiting communities' ability to plan for land use, infrastructure, and climate adaptation. Without clear data on how waterways behave during extreme weather, local governments are forced to make high-stakes decisions without knowing where flooding is most likely to occur, or which solutions will be most effective.

Governor Hochul will advance FloodSafe NY to better understand and manage flood risk by aligning watershed studies, implementation grants, and stream monitoring into a single, coordinated resiliency effort. Building on the Resilient NY program and the Resilient Watersheds Grant Program, this initiative will help communities by identifying flood-prone areas and supporting practical mitigation strategies. FloodSafe NY will also strengthen the state's stream gauge network, giving local governments better data on flooding patterns and hydrologic trends. Together, these efforts will help communities anticipate flood risks earlier, make smarter infrastructure decisions, and reduce damage from future flooding events.

## **Investing in Coastal Resiliency for Local Communities**

New York's coastlines face growing risks from sea-level rise, storm surge, and increasingly severe coastal storms that threaten homes, infrastructure, and local economies. Governor Hochul will continue investing in coastal resiliency by advancing a new round of grants to local communities for targeted projects that strengthen shorelines, protect critical assets, and reduce flood risk in vulnerable communities. This effort will prioritize nature-based solutions such as living shorelines and restored wetlands that absorb storm impacts while improving water quality and ecosystem health.

By building on proven approaches and partnering with local governments and community organizations, New York will safeguard coastal communities while preserving access to working waterfronts and natural resources. These actions will help ensure that coastal regions across the state are better prepared, more resilient, and able to thrive in the face of a changing climate.

## **Enhancing Implementation of Waterfront Revitalization Plans**

Many New York communities have completed Local Waterfront Revitalization Plans, but lack the tools to move from planning to action, leaving critical restoration and flood risk reduction projects unrealized. Governor Hochul will advance a new round of support to help communities implement priority projects identified in their approved waterfront plans. This effort will focus on restoring natural shorelines, improving public access, reducing flood risk, and revitalizing underutilized waterfront areas. By helping communities turn locally driven plans into on-the-ground improvements, the State will strengthen resilience, protect water quality, and support economic revitalization in inland waterfront communities across New York.

## **Coordinating and Streamlining Resilience Resources for Local Communities**

Local governments often struggle to navigate a fragmented landscape of state agencies and programs when advancing resilience projects, slowing progress and increasing risk and inefficiencies. Governor Hochul will direct the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to launch the Adaptation and Resilience Network, a one-stop online hub that consolidates guidance, tools, and

resources across agencies. The Network will simplify access to information on permitting, funding opportunities, and best practices for climate-resilient infrastructure. By reducing complexity and improving coordination, this effort will help communities move resilience projects from concept to construction more efficiently.

## **Supporting Resilient, Adaptive Communities**

As climate change drives more frequent and severe weather events, many of New York's frontline and lower-income communities lack reliable ways to stay connected, safe, and functional during emergencies, especially when power or communications are disrupted.

To address this, Governor Hochul will launch a new competitive grant program to support community-based organizations in environmental justice and disadvantaged communities for strengthening local preparedness and response capabilities. The program will prioritize the development of Community Resiliency Hubs, which are trusted neighborhood locations equipped to support residents during extreme weather and other emergencies. Grants will also help local organizations secure essential response equipment needed to protect public health and safety in the critical hours following a disaster. By strengthening community-level readiness, this initiative will help ensure that assistance reaches the most climate-vulnerable New Yorkers quickly and effectively.

## **Supporting Plugging Toxic, Abandoned Wells**

New York has thousands of unplugged oil and gas wells that pose ongoing risks to drinking water, public health, and the environment. When these wells are not properly plugged and sealed, they can leak oil, and methane, threatening nearby communities and contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. Governor Hochul will provide additional resources for the DEC to accelerate and further support well plugging, reduce pollution, and ensure public safety.

## **Expanding Access to State Parks for All New Yorkers**

New York's state parks have experienced more than a decade of consecutive growth in visitation, reflecting strong and sustained interest from residents and visitors alike. This growth has been driven by investments in park facilities, programming, and accessibility, as well as growing demand for affordable outdoor recreation. Just last year, New York State's Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (State Parks) reported a record 88.3 million visitors in 2024 at its more than 250 parks, historic sites, recreational trails, golf courses, and more.

Governor Hochul will build on this momentum by expanding access to and experiences in state parks across the state for young people and their families. This effort will introduce hundreds of wellness and recreational activities statewide, facilitate collaboration with local communities to identify new pedestrian entrances to parks including near schools, and expand the Explorer Club Activity Book pilot that encourages children ages five to 13 to engage with parks through educational activities. Together, these actions will help more New Yorkers experience their parks as welcoming spaces for recreation, learning, and health.

# Chapter 11: Building Resilient Communities for New Yorkers

Every New Yorker should have the chance to build a life they're proud of. That's close to impossible if you're struggling day-to-day or if support can't meet you where you are.

Communities grow resilient when barriers to access fall away. Governor Hochul is leveling the playing field by investing in New Yorkers' independence, dignity, and opportunity. Since 2021, her administration has:

- Delivered millions of dollars in opioid settlement funding to the providers and communities that need it most.
- Signed legislation that designated New York as a Purple Heart state, expanded employment opportunities for disabled Veterans, and safeguarded the benefits received by Veterans.
- Expanded first responders' ability to care for and protect New Yorkers with disabilities during emergencies and natural disasters.
- Issued executive orders directing the State to identify and remove barriers to employment and increase opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Scaled the number of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics to 39, ensuring more New Yorkers have access to walk-in, integrated mental health and substance disorder services.
- Opened 1,000 psychiatric beds for people who need access to intensive behavioral health services.
- Launched the Office of Chief Disability Officer; the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Office; and the Employment First Office, which coordinate across disability programs to connect benefits to underserved communities.

In 2026, she will double down on those investments by streamlining access to services, strengthening behavioral health supports, and empowering entrepreneurs to innovate. In doing so, she will send the same message to everyone from Veterans to fashion designers to kids in parks: Welcome to New York.

## *Promoting Civic and Community Engagement*

### **Establishing the Governor's Medal to Recognize New Yorkers Who Make Exceptional Civic Contributions**

During the upcoming 250th anniversary of the United States, the Governor's Medal, honoring New Yorkers whose contributions have shaped and strengthened our state's civic and cultural life, will be presented. Governor Hochul has made civic engagement, the arts, and culture core priorities through sustained public investment and recognition. The Governor's Medal will be awarded to New Yorkers who have made extraordinary contributions to their communities and whose achievements in public service, the arts, culture, and innovation exemplify New York's continuing leadership, and enduring influence at home and around the world.

### **Commemorating the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution and the History of New York**

This year marks the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, presenting a historic opportunity to commemorate New York's history and reflect on our future. New York State's preparations to observe the importance of the Revolutionary War period lead the nation, with over \$75 million in completed, underway, or planned investments at dozens of New York State Parks Revolutionary War sites across the state.

To commemorate the rich and diverse history of New York, Governor Hochul is launching the process to create the New York History Preservation and Resource Center (History PaRC). This ambitious project will convert the existing Division for Historic Preservation's headquarters on Peebles Island State Park in Waterford into a cutting-edge public history hub. The History PaRC's facilities will be designed to vastly improve public access to New York's historic collections and preservation programs with the goal of inspiring life-long learning and appreciation of New York's history. Beyond public exhibition space, it will also function as a collaborative center for training and workshops, historical research, and will foster greater cooperation among state agencies and cultural organizations.

## **Establishing the New York State Parks Trades Corps**

As New York works to maintain and improve its state parks, many facilities face aging infrastructure and a shortage of skilled workers to complete needed repairs and upgrades; at the same time, we have many young people looking for pathways into economically viable careers.

Governor Hochul will establish the New York State Parks Trades Corps, a pilot program that creates hands-on pathways for young people to enter skilled trades, while supporting critical park improvements. The program will provide participants with paid, real-world experience, training, and industry-recognized certifications that prepare them for long-term careers in high-demand trade fields. By connecting young people to meaningful work in state parks, the Trades Corps will help bridge the transition from school to the workforce while simultaneously restoring public assets that serve families and communities. The pilot will begin with targeted restoration work at Camp Baker in Harriman State Park, expanding access to affordable outdoor recreation for New Yorkers.

## **Doubling Empire State Service Corps Opportunities for SUNY Students**

Young people across New York State are eager to engage in meaningful public service work and volunteerism that can benefit their communities and enhance their skillsets but are deterred by being unable to forgo paid work. To extend opportunities for civic engagement by younger New Yorkers, Governor Hochul launched the Empire State Service Corps (ESSC) in 2024, a program designed to create paid public service opportunities for college students across New York in fields like K-12 tutoring, peer mental health, and sustainability. Demand has been overwhelming, with nearly 2,000 SUNY students applying for 500 slots in the inaugural ESSC.

Building on SUNY's commitment to civics and service and to provide additional opportunities for young people to get involved, Governor Hochul will double the size of the ESSC on SUNY campuses and include new program areas to meet New York's most pressing needs—including offering new capacity to assist disaster recovery.

## **Supporting Not-for-Profits that Serve New Yorkers**

Not-for-profit organizations deliver vital services to New Yorkers on behalf of the state, including services to combat homelessness, domestic violence services, mental health care, food assistance, indigent legal services, and much more. These organizations need predictable processes and on-time payments to ensure they can provide these services effectively. Last year, Governor Hochul directed her Office of Customer Experience to undertake a review of not-for-profit contracting and to implement changes to streamline funding. Building on this ongoing effort, Governor Hochul will issue direction to all state agencies to provide consistent, clarifying guidance to contractors on timing and eligible expenses for reimbursement.

## **Safeguarding Tax-Deductible Charitable Donations**

Individuals who make donations to entities that are tax-exempt can deduct those contributions on their personal income tax return. This federal policy, which has been in effect since 1917, provides important incentives for individuals to donate to worthy causes and has expanded national capacity for charitable giving. Recent public challenges to the historical tax-exempt status of certain universities and other organizations have led to concerns that donors will lose their ability to deduct contributions to these organizations.

To ensure that New Yorkers retain the ability to donate to their tax-exempt charity of choice without punishment, Governor Hochul will support legislation to ensure that donations made to entities that lose their federal tax-exempt status, but continue to meet New York's tax exemption standards, could continue to qualify as a charitable deduction for New York income tax purposes. This action will ensure that individuals who support these organizations will continue to receive the state tax benefits that they have historically been allowed to claim.

## *Strengthening Our Supports*

### **Establishing On-Campus Clinics Serving Student Veterans**

Approximately 33,000 Veterans are enrolled in higher education across New York, with SUNY and CUNY supporting nearly 10,000 Veterans, military-connected family members, and reservists. These student Veterans face unique hurdles, including financial burdens, family responsibilities, and coping with service-related disabilities, which make it more challenging to persist and complete their degrees, even though these credentials will position them for long-term economic success.

Governor Hochul will build on her commitment to Veterans by announcing the establishment of Veterans Services Clinics on every SUNY and CUNY campus across the state. Operated at the beginning, middle, and end of each semester, these clinics will bring together resources from across state agencies to help student Veterans access tutoring, resources, support, and community. These clinics will offer individualized, one-on-one appointments so student Veterans can have their unique needs addressed and met. The Veterans Clinics will help Veterans ensure they receive their G.I. Bill benefits in a timely manner and will connect them with Veteran support services on campus. They will also help them figure out how to maximize tuition assistance programs available to them, and link them with resources that will maximize their academic success.

### **Building a Center of Excellence for Cannabis Care and Health Equity**

Black and Brown neighborhoods in New York tend to have more recreational cannabis dispensaries and fewer medical cannabis dispensaries and pathways to clinical care than other neighborhoods. As a result, they are less likely to have access to therapeutic products or even be aware that these medical products exist.

Governor Hochul will help reduce these disparities by announcing a first-in-the-nation Center of Excellence for Medical Cannabis and Health Equity. Developed with medical schools and residency programs, the Center will train clinicians on cannabis pharmacology, evidence-based care, and patient counseling—topics that are rarely covered in traditional medical education—so providers

beyond medical dispensaries are equipped to counsel prospective medical cannabis patients and manage ongoing care.

## **Strengthening Suicide Prevention and Well-being for Vulnerable New Yorkers**

Suicide rates are rising nationally, and New York is not immune. While mental health struggles can affect anyone, certain communities face heightened risks due to social isolation, discrimination, and a lack of culturally competent care, including Veterans, individuals living in rural and tribal communities, older men, and Black, Latino, and LGBTQ+ youth. These New Yorkers often experience unique stressors—such as unmet clinical needs or housing and financial instability—that increase the risk of suicide but make it harder to access support.

Governor Hochul will bolster New York’s suicide prevention system for all, including high-risk populations. She will direct the State’s Office of Mental Health (OMH) to lead and agencies to participate in a three-year suicide prevention action plan that raises awareness of risk factors including housing instability, financial insecurity, and limited access to culturally responsive care. This crucial planning exercise will help save lives by ensuring that vulnerable New Yorkers are seen, heard, and supported before they reach a point of crisis.

## **Building Community with GRACE**

Despite historic investments in New York’s comprehensive system of addiction services, and the downward trend of overdose deaths statewide, inequities still remain. Communities of color continue to suffer from a disproportionate loss of life from overdoses. Systemic inequities in accessing culturally responsive care, compounded by a persistent social stigma, create barriers to seeking life-saving treatment.

Research shows that faith-based organizations are uniquely positioned to help close these gaps; however, many currently lack the training and resources to fully meet the needs of their congregations and communities. Governor Hochul will address these challenges by announcing GRACE (Guided Recovery Action through Congregational Engagement), an initiative that empowers faith leaders to join New York’s comprehensive approach to addressing the overdose crisis statewide.

GRACE will create an interagency collaboration between New York’s Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) and the Department of State’s Interfaith Advisory Council to engage faith-based organizations serving communities of color. This effort will also include working with education institutions to develop training that help faith leaders recognize the signs of substance use, reduce stigma, and connect individuals and families to care. This will support the Governor’s commitment to ensuring equitable access to services in communities across the state.

## **Broadening Access to Private Adoptive Placements**

Private adoptions, also known as independent adoptions, are adoptions that are not facilitated through foster care or an adoption agency. In a private adoption, birth mothers directly place their newborns with prospective adoptive parents. Many New York families rely on this type of adoption, which offers unique benefits for both adoptive and birth parents, including increased control, flexibility, and potentially expedited finalizations. However, New York’s rules related to reimbursements for birth mothers are out of sync with other states, making it harder for New York parents to adopt from out of state. To provide greater parity with other states and ease these burdens, Governor Hochul will advance legislation to improve reimbursements for birth mothers while maintaining strict requirements regarding safety and ethics.

## **Integrating Care for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders**

An estimated 60 percent of people receiving substance use disorder treatment also have co-occurring mental health conditions. However, behavioral health services are often divided by regulatory “silos” that fail to reflect the reality of the patients they serve. This fragmentation leads to redundancy and potentially conflicting regulations, ultimately forcing patients to travel to multiple locations or navigate two separate systems to access the care they need.

Governor Hochul will cut red tape and break down barriers to care by allowing clinics to provide mental health and substance use services under a single, jointly issued license. She will also introduce a new Co-Occurring Capable (CoC) designation for OMH and OASAS-certified providers who meet the highest standards for treating complex, overlapping cases.

By prioritizing people over primary diagnoses, the Governor will ensure accurate assessments, more effective treatment plans, and a stronger path to recovery for the millions of New Yorkers living with co-occurring disorders.

## **Curbing Gambling Addiction through Additional Prevention and Treatment**

As access to gambling increases, it is crucially important that New York has a comprehensive approach to safeguard New Yorkers from harms associated with problem gambling. Governor Hochul will take comprehensive action to strengthen prevention, treatment, and harm reduction around problem gambling through evidence-based practices and supports, as well as implementing a data-driven approach to identify and address long-term trends. Specifically, she will:

- Advance legislation to ensure treatment for addiction disorders are covered by insurance.
- Integrate gambling recovery services into 16 recovery community and outreach centers, including peer advocates.
- Establish a Gambling Health Institute that equips organizations statewide with the tools and training they need to address problem gambling.
- Create a specialized certification for peer advocates who have lived experience with gambling harms.
- Limit betting platforms' ability to use AI-powered services to exploit consumers' gambling habits through personalized promotions and wagers that keep individuals gambling beyond their intended limit.
- Direct the Gaming Commission to issue guidance on ways to positively utilize new technological tools to assist with identifying and proactively helping those who may need assistance.
- Launch a 10-year statewide study to assess gambling health trends, evaluate prevention outcomes, and guide future programming decisions.

By investing in evidence-based practices to prevent and treat gambling addiction, the Governor will

make sure gambling's growth doesn't come at New Yorkers' expense.

## **Increasing Resources for Behavioral Health Supportive Housing Programs**

Individuals recovering from serious mental illness or addiction benefit from stable living options with on-site services as they reintegrate into their communities. OMH and OASAS oversee Supportive Housing programs that support this type of community-based housing for those in recovery. Governor Hochul is investing \$71 million to increase rates for these programs to ensure that residential providers have sufficient resources to maintain housing capacity for more than 23,000 individuals in recovery and avoid more costly emergency room visits and inpatient care. Supporting individuals as they transition out of homelessness or inpatient care reflects Governor Hochul's commitment to keeping New Yorkers housed, supporting recovery, and ensuring access to care with dignity and stability.

## ***Building a More Inclusive State***

### **Supporting Families by Improving Reading and Language Acquisition Equality for Deaf Children**

Each year, nearly 2,500 babies across the state who are flagged as being potentially Deaf, DeafBlind, or Hard of Hearing (DDBHH) at birth do not make it to their DDBHH follow-up screening. This fall-off means that these babies are not receiving the follow-up care and language acquisition information they need and can result in many DDBHH children entering school with limited language skills.

Governor Hochul will direct the Department of Health's Early Intervention (EI) and Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) programs to analyze why this fall-off between screenings is happening and work to alleviate barriers. These programs will also identify, develop, and work with hospitals and birthing centers statewide to disseminate language acquisition milestones to families with babies that are initially flagged as being potentially DDBHH, in case they do not make it to their second screening. Finally, EHDI will incorporate language acquisition principles into their

existing EHDI Advisory Council framework, which will assess why so many babies do not make it to their second screening and provide recommendations for how to better evaluate language acquisition. These actions will ensure that DDBHH children are prepared and ready to enter school with the language skills they need to succeed.

## **Establishing "These Lands are for Everyone" to Expand Access to State Lands for All New Yorkers**

Governor Hochul believes that our communities are stronger when we break down barriers and expand access to New Yorkers with disabilities. To ensure that our parks and open spaces are accessible and inclusive, Governor Hochul is launching the These Lands are for Everyone Initiative, which will invest in immersive, welcoming destinations on state lands that are accessible to and inclusive for children with and without disabilities alike. Example projects that will be funded through this initiative include the Adirondacks for All tactile displays, All Are Welcome in the Catskills sensory trails, as well as a new “Living Building” education center at the Reinstein Woods Nature Preserve. These investments will help remove barriers and accommodate various sensory and mobility needs—so that all children in New York can benefit from our state’s treasured parks and lands.

## **Launching Inclusive SUNY and CUNY: Changes to Ensure Access for Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities have lower college attendance and completion rates than their non-disabled peers. To address this, Governor Hochul will direct SUNY and CUNY to launch a number of initiatives to increase access to higher education for students with disabilities. These proposals include creating a for-credit inclusive post-secondary education (IPSE) at a SUNY and a CUNY campus and directing SUNY and CUNY to partner with the State Education Department to develop a formal transition from high school to college for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). These actions will ensure that students with disabilities have fair and equal access to quality education resources and learning opportunities.

## **Establishing an Assistive Technology Innovation Center**

People with disabilities and older adults rely heavily on assistive technology to age in place and navigate their environments with autonomy. Approximately one in four New Yorkers is living with a disability, and more than half of older adults use assistive technology to age in place. Assistive tech also contributes to higher employment rates: 92 percent of employed persons with disabilities reported assistive devices helped them work faster or better, and 83 percent indicated access to these technologies resulted in greater pay and more professional advancement opportunities.

To remove barriers to widespread commercialization of such technology, support its research and development, and increase access for persons with disabilities, Governor Hochul will direct Empire State Development (ESD) to create a new Assistive Technology Innovation Center (“The Center”). The Center will foster collaboration between researchers and private partners, to accelerate the innovation-to-market pipeline. It will also provide a supportive ecosystem for promising startups with mentorship opportunities and access to specialized lab equipment. Finally, it will create an informational environment that includes inputs from the disability community, academia, industry, and more.

By bringing together diverse expertise and resources, the Center will help develop trailblazing solutions for individuals with disabilities and older adults, empowering them to live independent lives—building a more inclusive and accessible future for all New Yorkers.

## **Expanding Governor Hochul’s Fashion Innovation Center to Advance Adaptive Clothing for People with Disabilities**

Many people with disabilities have fewer clothing options available to them in professional, personal, and recreational contexts, creating unnecessary barriers to independence, confidence and most especially employment. Conventional garments with buttons, zippers, or restrictive designs can be painful, unsafe, unflattering, or impossible to wear for a person with disabilities.

To address these concerns and build on New York’s legacy as one of the fashion capitals of the

world, Governor Hochul will launch an Adaptive Clothing Grant Program, administered by ESD's Fashion Innovation Center. The program will provide grants to designers, entrepreneurs, and researchers for new and innovative adaptive clothing that is designed for people with disabilities. This program will work to meaningfully improve the quality of life of the myriad individuals with disabilities in New York and ensure that all New Yorkers have access to clothing that levels the playing field for people with disabilities within the fashion world and empowers them to look and feel their best.

## **Streamlining Access to American Sign Language (ASL) Translation**

Hundreds of thousands of Americans communicate in American Sign Language (ASL) and other sign languages, and New York is a global center of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (DDBHH) worlds. However, sign languages are not currently covered under New York's Language Access Law, which means that New Yorkers who need a sign language interpreter to access government services must make a reasonable accommodation request through a process based in the state Human Rights Law and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This extra step can cause delays, particularly when agencies request medical documentation to justify the accommodation. The process also treats DDBHH New Yorkers as if they have a medical need at that moment—which is usually not the case—and many DDBHH people may not regularly see a doctor in connection with their hearing.

Governor Hochul will increase speed and access to services for New Yorkers who use sign language by issuing guidance to state agencies about the provision of ASL and other sign language interpretation for accessing agency services or benefits. This guidance will also instruct agencies to translate websites and vital documents into ASL videos upon request, as resources allow. Agencies already have the ability to deliver interpretation via centralized contracts, and the Office of General Services (OGS) is available to provide additional guidance and resourcing. This initiative will ensure New Yorkers who use sign languages will be able to more quickly and easily access government information and services.

## **Ensuring Health Equity for New Yorkers with Disabilities**

People with disabilities often receive lower quality healthcare than people without disabilities, leading to poorer health outcomes and shorter lifespans. These gaps in healthcare are linked to issues like inaccessible physical environments, insufficient provider training, and difficulties accessing safe transportation, but the State lacks actionable data on these issues.

To better understand and address structural inequities New Yorkers with disabilities face, Governor Hochul will direct the Department of Health's Disability and Health Program, in coordination with the Office of the Chief Disability Officer, to collect and analyze data about their experiences. This data will be used to identify barriers to care and ways and inform an action plan for improving health equity across the healthcare spectrum to help improve outcomes for individuals with disabilities.



**YOUR FAMILY.  
YOUR FUTURE.  
MY FIGHT.**



**Governor Kathy Hochul**

2026 State of the State

