

THE CENTER

2023 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Workforce Development
March 1, 2023

Testimony of
The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center
New York, NY

**THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL &
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony for the 2023 joint legislative budget regarding Workforce Development.

New York City's LGBT community formed The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center (The Center) in 1983, in response to the AIDS epidemic, ensuring a place for LGBT people to access information, care and support they were not receiving elsewhere. Now the largest LGBT multi service organization on the East Coast, The Center sees more than 6,000 weekly visitors and hosts over 400 community group meetings each month. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, we adapted rapidly to offer virtual services that meet community needs during an extremely isolating time. Now The Center's building is alive with activity, and we want to highlight our solid track record of working for and with the community to increase access to a diverse range of high-quality services and resources, including our substance use recovery programming for adults and youth; HIV/AIDS programming; youth programs; and our families and opportunities work. Government support from the New York State Legislature is essential to our ongoing provisions of services.

The Center's services

Through our robust direct services, each year, we see over 3,500 unique adults and youth, which provides us great insight into community needs. One consistent challenge we observe—particularly amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic across race, sexual orientation and gender identities—are cycles of poverty and economic instability disproportionately impacting our most vulnerable community members, to the detriment of their physical and mental, well-being. Transgender people, for example, are up to four times more likely to live in poverty and experience unstable or unreliable housing. Prior to the pandemic, one-third of transgender people of color earn less than \$10,000 each year. From our work with LGBT youth in the child welfare system, we also know first hand about youth who are rejected by their families or forced to flee placements that did not affirm who they are, and are at a higher risk for homelessness and HIV infection, suffer academically, are more likely to live in poverty, and are more likely to abuse substances as a result. We know that COVID-19 has heightened threats to economic justice while also exacerbating an array of longstanding disparities. Through this, our programs provide opportunities for those who need them the most, in direct response to these increasingly unmet needs.

Despite legal protections in New York State, the effects of discrimination continue to place trans and gender nonconforming communities at extremely high rates of poverty, unemployment, underemployment and homelessness. The Center provides services to directly combat this inequality, including individual career coaching support, case management, events focused on career exploration, legal workshops and networking opportunities.

LGBTWorks

In response to the ongoing economic injustice, The Center designed and implemented LGBTWorks, an economic opportunities initiative that directly addresses the economic disparities highlighted above through personal and professional development programming.

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This initiative offers programming specifically tailored to address the needs of our community, particularly for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) and TGNCNB (Transgender, gender non-conforming, and nonbinary) people. **For FY24, The Center respectfully requests a \$200,000 appropriation in the New York State FY24 budget to support The Center's economic justice program, "LGBTWorks"**. With a focus on connection, leadership and support, components of the initiative include:

- Workforce readiness activities including resume review, mock interviews, job training resources and career coaching.
- Paid internships, GET IT Fellowships and SAFE2 Internships, with placements in corporations and non-profit organizations to give hands on learning and a direct pipeline to sustainable employment.
- An annual career fair, "Queer in Every Career" that draws dozens of corporations and non-profit organizations for over 200 job seekers hosted at The Center.
- A peer navigation component, ensuring community members have the tools to access a range of resources devoted to their professional success.
- An evidence-based mentoring program
- Academic enrichment programs, including GED and HSE courses
- Networking opportunities exclusive to the communities being served
- Seminars devoted to a broad range of topics designed for and led by community members such as how to start your own business, personal finance and basic computer literacy
- Offerings that respond directly to input from youth, women and transgender individuals, as well as evidenced-based research to enhance program effectiveness

For over three decades, The Center has worked to ensure that the LGBT community of New York City has access to the highest quality and most diverse range of services and resources. Though we are living in a time of unprecedented social, legal and political acceptance of the LGBTQ community, there is still much work to be done on a local and state level to ensure that our community members can successfully combat the social and economic injustice they face daily.

As the legislature prepares for its budget negotiations, we ask that you prioritize funding the services that we mentioned above. Thank you to the Committee for the opportunity to provide this testimony today on an issue of great importance across New York State. We look forward to continuing working with you to ensure New York's future as a safe space for all New Yorkers.

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