



**Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc.
Testimony at the New York State Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Human Services
January 31st, 2024**

Thank you Senator Krueger, Assemblymember Weinstein, Senator Persaud, and Assemblymember Davila for the opportunity to testify today. The mission of the Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc. (CPC) is to promote social and economic empowerment of Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income communities. CPC was founded in 1965 as a grassroots, community-based organization in response to the end of the Chinese Exclusion years and the passing of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. Our services have expanded to include three key program areas: education, family support, and community and economic empowerment.

CPC is the largest Asian American social service organization in the U.S., providing vital resources to more than 80,000 people per year in all five boroughs through more than 50 programs at over 30 sites. CPC employs over 700 staff whose comprehensive services are linguistically accessible, culturally sensitive, and highly effective in reaching low-income and immigrant individuals and families. With the firm belief that social service can incite social change, CPC strives to empower our constituents as agents of social justice, with the overarching goal of advancing and transforming communities.

To that end, we are grateful to testify about issues regarding the human service sector that greatly impact our communities. The COVID-19 pandemic was a crisis that merely magnified the importance of the human service sector and the shortcomings in our social safety net. During the pandemic, we were able to get over 200,000 community members referred to testing sites throughout the five boroughs, over 10,000 older adults scheduled for COVID-19 vaccine appointments, and 2,334 community members connected to after care services for long-term COVID-19 symptoms. These are lifesaving services for our community members especially given the severity of the crisis and how disproportionately it impacted our AAPI, low-income, and immigrant communities. However, as Federal COVID-19 relief funding is quickly running out, our community members' needs have only continued to grow. It is critical that the State invest in our social safety net to ensure that all New Yorkers can thrive through the following:

Investing in the human service sector through fully funding programs and wages:

The human service sector has been filling in the gaps for decades of failed governmental policies and inaction. New York City's 40,000 contracted human services workers have been essential workers throughout this crisis, providing critical services on the frontline as well as remotely. Our sector has been historically undervalued despite the grueling and exhaustive work that our workers have had to endure to ensure that our communities are protected and uplifted. They have been doing this lifesaving work since before the pandemic and this health crisis has merely magnified the importance of these services.

We are proud members of the #JustPay campaign, which is a racial equity and gender justice campaign committed to ending the government exploitation of human services workers by demanding sector employees under contract with the New York City and State be paid fair wages for their labor. Each year you hear from providers who are struggling due to the crisis of compounding underfunding of the human services sector as City budgets are balanced on the backs of low-income neighborhoods and BIPOC communities. This practice has resulted in poverty-level wages for human services workers, who are predominantly women (66%) and

people of color (68%). In fact, according to a [report from HSC](#), nonprofit human service workers have been historically underpaid, making about 71% of what government employees make and 82% of what private sector workers make for the same role.

Alongside the organizations on the #Just Pay campaign, we are fighting for the full 3.2% COLA for all human services workers and the passage of [the wage board bill](#).

In addition, we urge the legislature to pass the following top priorities:

- **Invest in AAPI organizations** through the AAPI Equity Budget to address anti-Asian violence and meet urgent community needs
- **Restructuring the non-for-profit contracting advisory committee** by passing [A7531](#).
- **Invest in our New York:** pass revenue raising bills to fund \$40 billion in new investments ensure that vital programs and safety net services are fully funded and ensure the ultra-wealthy and corporations are contributing their fair share
- **Enhance the Settlement House Program** from \$2.45 million to \$5 million.
- **Early Childhood Education:** Establish a new fund for localities to serve all income-eligible families, use Economic Development Funds to support childcare programs, expand the Child Care Tax Credit, allocate \$5 million to Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) to provide additional training.
- **Universal Child Care:** Pass the Universal Child Care Act ([S3245/A4815](#)) to ensure that all children, regardless of ages or type of setting, have quality care and pass the Early Learning Child Care Act ([S4883](#)) that would not only enrich the minds of children ages three and under but provide the necessary funding and resources to child care facilities to ensure they are supported.
- **Child Welfare:** Restore the Open-Ended Preventive/Protective Services State-funded portion to 65/35; invest \$17 million to raise wages for foster care workers.
- **Adult Literacy:** Restore Adult Literacy Education (ALE) to \$9.8 million to keep programs whole. Invest an additional \$9.3 million for the ALE Stabilization and Enhancement Fund to begin to stabilize and enhance ALE programs by increasing the rate per student and allowing providers to better serve the 6,600 New Yorkers enrolled. Invest an additional \$9.3 million in FY25 to reach and serve an additional 3,300 students at an increased rate per student.
- **Supporting Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities:** include an 8.5% Cost-Of-Living-Adjustment (COLA), as well as the establishment of a Direct Support Wage Enhancement (DSWE) to increase hourly pay for Direct Support workers.
- **Senior services:** invest \$13.5 million in the home-delivered “meals on wheels” program.
- **Nutrition Access:** increase funding for the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) to a total of \$5.22 million to enable community-based organizations to conduct outreach and increase participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in all New York counties.

Access to comprehensive and affordable health care for all New Yorkers & investing in the home care sector to uplift and support our growing aging population:

At CPC, fully one in four community members that walks through our doors does not have health insurance. These are community members that rely on the emergency room for primary care, if they ever seek care at all. And for many of our undocumented community members, access to health care is stigmatized and not accessible to begin with. Therefore, we support the passage of [Coverage for All \(S2237B/A3020\)](#) to provide immediate relief and urge the passage of the [New York Health Act \(S7590/A07897\)](#) to truly guarantee universal and

affordable healthcare for all New Yorkers regardless of age, employment or financial status or immigration status.

Broadly speaking, New York State has the fourth oldest population in the nation, with 3.7 million people aged 60 and over. By 2030, [5.2 million people](#) in the state will be 60 and older, with 1.81 million New Yorkers will be 75 or older. An estimated [seven out of 10](#) people over the age of 65 will need some kind of long term care. In addition, there are over a million New Yorkers with disabilities, chronic illnesses, or other functional complications that require direct care, creating a significant population in New York State that requires direct care support to live and age in dignity. Direct care in homes and communities is either provided by unpaid family caregivers, paid family caregivers, or home health workers through an agency. Care that takes place in homes and in communities is often higher quality, preferred by consumers, and less costly overall than institutionalized care. Many immigrant seniors and families prefer home health care because they can receive language accessible and culturally competent care that they would not find in institutionalized settings.

Because of the growing needs of people with disabilities and an increasingly aging population, the home care sector is the largest employer in the nation, yet continues to face shortages. In NYC alone, [there are 187,000 home health](#) workers, and in New York State, there are over 330,600 home health workers. Yet because of growing need, by 2025, New York State will see a 33 percent growth in need for home health aides and face a shortage of [23,000 workers](#). While automation and investments in technology serve to improve the function and efficacy of hospitalization and institutionalized care, this portion of the healthcare industry is highly reliant on human work, adding urgency to investments in this workforce.

To combat the workforce shortage, and improve wages so that we can recruit and retain the workforce, and meet growing demand by passing [Fair Pay for Home Care \(S5374/A6329\)](#). This legislation would raise home care worker pay to 150% of the highest area minimum wage across the State. This would not only provide good jobs and dignified care in our communities, but according to a [CUNY study](#), it would eliminate the home care workforce shortage in less than five years while generating billions of dollars in economic spillover effects from raising wages.

Another critical measure to realize Medicaid savings is passing the [Home Care Savings & Reinvestment Act \(S7800/A8470\)](#). Back in 2011, the State gave control of its medicaid home care program to private insurance companies with the rationale that it would improve care through the use of care management. However, through this system, we have continued to witness the mismanagement of Medicaid funding that continues to line the pockets of insurance companies. This legislation seeks to eliminate Managed Long-term Care (MLTC) and would return home care management directly to the State. By doing this, it would generate \$3 billion in savings annually for the State, allowing the quality of services to improve and to address the workforce shortage through fair compensation.

Lastly, but certainly not least; we are deeply concerned about the proposed cuts to the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program (CDPAP). The proposed \$200 million wage parity cut would represent a 12% cut in wages to this critical and already-underpaid workforce, bringing total compensation for these home care workers to pre-2019 levels. This is not only devastating for workers who are already living in poverty, but for consumers who will continue to be unable to get the care they need because they can't find a worker at those wages.

For far too long, the State has prioritized profits over people. But, now is the time to rewrite that narrative and to create a dignified, healthy, and sustainable State.

Empowering and investing in our immigrant communities through legal services, the Unemployment Bridge Program, and immigrant serving programs:

As New York is experiencing an influx of asylum seekers, it is our State's responsibility to ensure that our immigrant communities no matter how long they have been here with the respect and dignity that they deserve. This includes adequate legal representation and ensuring that families that enter through the court system are fairly given a chance through passing the [Access to Representation Act \(S999A/A170\)](#) and allocate \$55 million for its implementation. In addition, we also urge the State to invest an additional \$150 million in legal services funding for immigrant families including the Liberty Defense Fund and enhancing the Office of New American Opportunity Centers funding and reinstating the ESOL gateway model.

Our immigrant communities were the ones at the frontlines of the pandemic and continue to provide essential services. The passage of the Excluded Workers Fund in 2021 was a lifesaving and valuable source for many of our immigrant communities as they recover from the health and economic crisis. CPC is one of many organizations that were supporting the rollout of the fund and assisting community members on the application process. While the fund was active, we experienced an extremely high volume of calls and fielded many questions around eligibility, fears around status, and the complicated process of document collection. We saw firsthand how the fund has supported our community members tremendously in being able to pay for basic necessities such as food, rent, and transportation. However, there were still thousands of people that were unable to access these funds despite struggling to make ends meet. Our current unemployment insurance programs and social safety nets in general do not include our immigrant communities. Therefore, we are urging the State legislature to pass the [Unemployment Bridge Program \(S3192/A4821\)](#) through investing \$500 million to fund a permanent unemployment fund for excluded workers that would include undocumented immigrants, freelancers, and formerly incarcerated individuals in the FY25 budget.

We also urge passage of the following measures:

- **Passing the Street Vendor Formalization Bill ([S1739/A3575](#)):** formalize and decriminalize the street vending industry by removing the currently insurmountable barrier to entry to the industry so that vendors may obtain permits to operate their business in accordance with the law.
- Pass bills to end the harms of the criminal legal and immigration system including: **New York for All ([S987/A5686](#))**, **Treatment not Jail ([S1976/A1263](#))** **Stop Violence in the Sex Trades ([S4396/A7175](#))**, **Fair and Timely Parole ([S307/A162](#))**, **Elder Parole ([S2423/A2035](#))**, **Dignity Not Detention ([S306/A4354](#))**, **End Predatory Court Fees ([S313/A4183](#))**.

New York has always been home to immigrants and during a time where there have been consistent anti-migrant attacks, we need to live up to our values by investing in communities that have been the backbone of our State's economy and cultural fabric.

Protect vulnerable New Yorkers from the housing crisis:

CPC serves a large immigrant population and it is crucial that we acknowledge that immigrant New Yorkers face disproportionate housing barriers, even prior to COVID-19. Immigrants are

more likely to be increasingly rent-burdened, live in overcrowded spaces, and live in substandard conditions that don't receive regular maintenance. First generation immigrants are more likely to be low income and significantly rent-burdened (more than 50% of income for rent) than second generation immigrants, at 19-35%. AAPI immigrants are also more likely to live in multi-generational households, which are more prone to crowding. In fact, according to 2021 data from the [Asian American Federation Data Center](#), they found that 49.5% of Asian households in New York are rent-burdened and 12.2% of Asian households are overcrowded. Additionally, AAPI immigrants face significant language barriers and access to public housing and assisted living. In combination with the long waiting lists of NYCHA and Section-8 Housing, AAPI immigrants are left with fewer opportunities to find truly affordable housing.

During the pandemic, we conducted wellness checks and we have heard from community members that they have fallen behind on rent, threatened by landlords, and have been illegally evicted. This remains to be an issue and it is unconscionable that in the midst of a health, economic, and housing crisis, the State legislature has yet to pass the [Good Cause Eviction bill \(S305/A4454\)](#), which would protect tenants from unjust evictions and from predatory rent hikes.

We also ask the State legislature to consider the following measures:

- Create a statewide rental assistance program through the **Housing Access Voucher Program** that includes undocumented New Yorkers ([S568/A4021](#)).
- Fully fund the **Housing Our Neighbors with Dignity Act (HONDA)**
- Pass legislation to create a Social Housing Development Authority (SHDA), a statewide authority with the power to build and preserve high-quality, affordable housing all across New York State
- Investing \$10 million to **provide service coordination in senior affordable housing services**

Meaningfully invest in accessible, equitable, and reliable transit system all while addressing the climate crisis:

We are part of Riders Alliance and we strongly endorse their Riders Agenda which calls on the State to meet the needs of riders, address inequality in transit access, and tackle the climate crisis. Firstly, the recent increase in the fare to \$2.90 has had adverse impacts on low-income, immigrant, and communities of color. In fact, [1.4 million New Yorkers](#) are currently living in poverty. Many have had to struggle between the idea of not affording their next meal and/or the potential of getting arrested by the NYPD. This is a dilemma that New Yorkers should not have to be facing in one of the wealthiest cities in the world. Increasing fare prices have and will continue to be mechanisms that criminalize poverty. Many of our young community members have expressed the difficulties in affordability especially when it comes to traveling to attend classes when the cost of tuition is astronomical and many are compounded with the issue of food insecurity. The future of our young people should not be reliant on whether they are able to afford a fare for the bus or the subway.

Despite the increase in fare prices, we have yet to see an improvement in services with delays and infrequent service that disproportionately impact communities of color. Not only does this impact the quality of life of New Yorkers but infrequent services negatively impact the City's economy. According to the [NYC Comptroller's office](#), they estimate that wait times of 5 minutes or more could cost the City up to \$398 million in economic activity annually. The State

legislature and the Governor can address issues of affordability and accessibility by passing the [MTA Freeze Fares, Fund Frequency & Free Bus Act \(S4024/A4122\)](#). When there are meaningful investments into our public transportation system, ridership will increase tremendously and we would be directly addressing the climate crisis.

Furthermore, it is critical that there be meaningful investment into our infrastructure in ensuring accessibility for all New Yorkers especially our seniors and populations with disabilities. Many of our seniors have expressed the difficulties and struggles in lifting their grocery carts up and down the stairs. This is a reflection of the very fact that many stations are not accessible and/or have elevators that are not functioning. In addition, the State legislature should work with City elected officials to address subway flooding and crumbling subway stations to ensure the safety of all New Yorkers. As we continue to face extreme weather conditions as a result of climate change, we need to push for infrastructure that is climate resilient. And if we continue to invest in public transportation, we are striving towards a more sustainable, greener, and more prosperous future.

In addition to address the climate crisis, we are urging the State to pass the following:

- **Pass the People's Climate Justice Budget** that calls for \$1 billion in critical funding for shovel ready, environmental justice projects
- Addressing the disproportionate impacts that climate change has had on marginalized communities through **passing the Climate, Jobs, and Justice Package** which includes the **NY Home Energy Affordable Transition Act (S2016A/A4592A)**, **Just Energy Transition Act (S2935C/A4866C)**, and the **Climate Change Superfund Act (S2129A/A4866C)**

In summary, a stronger and safer New York requires our State leadership to heavily and meaningfully invest in a social safety net that has historically left out communities that need it the most. The State has the resources and revenue raising measures to ensure that we expand and strengthen our social safety net. We urge the State legislature to take into consideration the aforementioned as budget negotiations are quickly approaching and ensure that our immigrant, low-income, and communities of color are not left out.

We thank you for the opportunity to testify and we look forward to working with the State legislature and the Governor to achieve these goals in the upcoming budget.

If there are any questions, please reach out to Ashley Chen, Policy Analyst at achen9@cpc-nyc.org.