
COMPASSIONATE NEW YORK: Saving Lives and Billions of Dollars After COVID

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed deep wealth and racial inequality in New York State. Working class and poor communities of color have been disproportionately harmed by a public health crisis that continues to wreak havoc. But the economic and racial injustices made worse by COVID-19 are not new. Long before the pandemic 1 million New Yorkers were without healthcare,¹ 92,000 were experiencing homelessness,² and over 50,000 were behind bars in jail³ or prison⁴ each day — with each of these injustices disproportionately impacting Black and brown communities.

It doesn't have to be this way. In fact, the New York of the near future can be a better, more just, and more compassionate place for everyone to live. Our Compassionate New York agenda outlines immediate actions the state legislature can take to save lives and billions of dollars:

1. **Guarantee healthcare for every New Yorker (New York Health Act)**
2. **Stop unjust evictions (Good Cause Eviction)**
3. **Decarcerate our state (Justice Roadmap)**

A more compassionate state is both morally right and fiscally responsible.

The Compassionate New York would save nearly \$12 billion in the first year of implementation alone with the New York Health Act reducing total healthcare spending by at least \$10 billion,⁵ Good Cause Eviction protections saving over \$1.6 billion,⁶ Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole will save \$522 million annually,⁷ and restoring financial aid access to incarcerated college students will save \$22 million.⁸ Additional decarceration measures will further reduce the \$18 billion annual price tag of New York's carceral system,⁹ while Clean Slate legislation will expand New York's GDP by \$7 billion.¹⁰

The COVID public health crisis has exacerbated existing crises of mass incarceration, lack of affordable housing, and limited access to healthcare. New Yorkers living in homeless shelters or enduring incarceration have been harmed not only by the COVID pandemic but also by our state government's cruel and inhumane policies. Our Compassionate New York package would shift the posture of state government from one of cruelty and exclusion to one of compassion while helping ensure a just and sustainable recovery for all.

Our recommended approach stands in stark contrast to Governor Cuomo's austerity budgeting and callous indifference to preventable suffering. In the last year New Yorkers have watched as Governor Cuomo mismanaged federal rent-relief funds causing our neighbors to be evicted, and allowed our elders to die in nursing homes and prisons. Today we call on the New York State Legislature to enact a better plan for life after COVID - one that will save billions of dollars, save lives, and advance a vision for a more compassionate New York.

To advance that vision, the state legislature must **guarantee healthcare for all; stop the violence of unjust evictions; and decarcerate New York by reducing the number of New Yorkers behind bars and addressing the harms of the criminal legal and immigration systems.**

GUARANTEE HEALTHCARE FOR EVERY NEW YORKER:

In the middle of the deadliest public health crisis in recent history, more than 1 million New Yorkers are uninsured¹¹ and millions more are under-insured¹² - priced out of accessing the care that they need. The COVID-19 pandemic puts everyone at risk, but Black, brown, and low-income New Yorkers carry the greatest burden of exposure, with disproportionately more serving as essential workers and disproportionately fewer having access to healthcare. Meanwhile, private health insurance corporations continue to make record profits by denying care, as tens of thousands of New Yorkers die, lose income, lose their homes, and struggle to pay unaffordable medical bills. The New York Health Act [A6058/S5474] will remove the financial and insurance barriers that keep healthcare segregated and that contribute to higher rates of preventable illnesses in BIPOC communities.

The New York Health Act [A6058/S5474] will provide universal, comprehensive health coverage to all New Yorkers. No one will fear going without coverage again—especially not in the middle of a pandemic.

New York Health Act: Universal, Guaranteed Healthcare (Rivera/Gottfried) includes:

- **Universal Coverage** for everyone who works full-time in or lives in New York, regardless of immigration or employment status.
- **Comprehensive Benefits** such as coverage for medical, prescription, vision, dental, hearing, long-term care and support services, mental health and substance use treatment, and reproductive care. One comprehensive plan, freedom of provider choice, and no narrow networks.
- **Progressive Financing** from a graduated tax on income based on ability to pay. This sliding scale will result in lower costs for at least 90% of New Yorkers¹³. Most businesses will see lower healthcare costs too. There will be no regressive copays or deductibles that prevent people from accessing timely care.
- **Lower Costs** for all covered services and mechanisms for containing costs and eliminating administrative waste. Enactment will result in at least \$10 billion less in total health care spending in New York State¹⁴. Public hospitals and clinics in New York will receive fair payment for the patients they serve and some may even see an increase in reimbursement rates.

STOP EVICTIONS:

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the deep flaws in New York's housing system that have exacerbated existing crises in our state. Even before the pandemic, there were 92,000 New Yorkers experiencing homelessness.¹⁵ Today, 1.3 million households in our state are behind on their rent and could face eviction on May 1st.¹⁶ These households collectively owe \$2.2 billion in rental debt.¹⁷ The crisis of rental debt could have cascading and lasting effects on our state and leave millions of people homeless or at risk of eviction.

According to The Cost Of Eviction calculator, created by the Innovation for Justice Program at the University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law, evictions cost New York State upwards of \$1.6 billion annually.¹⁸ Good Cause eviction is a straightforward, revenue-neutral proposal that could keep millions of people housed as the pandemic-era eviction protections lift.

Good Cause Eviction (Salazar/Hunter)

- **Gives a Right to Renew Tenancy** for all renters, regardless of immigration status, with limits to rent increases based on consumer price index. Provides every New Yorker with stability in their home and allows tenants to live protected from dramatic rent increases due to speculation or harassment.
- **Provides the right to renew your lease, free from the fear of a rent increase to millions** of unregulated renters across New York State. Every tenant in New York will enjoy good cause eviction protections.
- **Prohibits eviction absent a showing of "good cause"** or intention of owner-occupancy. Gives every renter the right to renew their lease, absent an order from a judge showing "good cause."

DECARCERATE OUR STATE:

Since the start of the pandemic, over [6,300 New Yorkers](#) incarcerated in state prisons, comprising nearly 20% of the state prison population, have contracted COVID-19.¹⁹ Despite spikes in cases and deaths, and against the advice of public health officials, Governor Cuomo has repeatedly failed to take action. After nearly a year of the COVID crisis the Governor has granted a total of ten clemencies to New Yorkers in prison - fewer pandemic clemencies than governors in California, Illinois, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and other states across the country. Parole release rates fell during the pandemic, exactly when they should have risen. Instead of releasing people from prison Governor Cuomo has condemned thousands, including people who have tested positive for the virus, to solitary confinement - a practice that is not only inhumane but also exacerbates the harm and spread of COVID-19.

The pandemic laid bare New York's costly and deadly incarceration crisis. The fiscal cost is clear: New York spends \$18.2 billion on the carceral system each year.²⁰ The human cost is similarly clear: Thousands of elderly and immunocompromised New Yorkers continue to serve decades-long sentences in prisons with a lack of meaningful opportunities for release. 2.3 million New Yorkers with old conviction records suffer life-long discrimination in employment and housing. Immigrant communities continue to be at risk of deportation and detention by ICE. Like the COVID-19 pandemic more broadly, each of these injustices disproportionately impacts Black and brown communities by compounding existing social inequality and makes critical issues of public health, racial justice, and criminal justice ripe for reform in 2021.

DECARCERATE OUR STATE: (CONTINUED)

New York's legislature must take action to address the public health crisis behind bars by passing the [Justice Roadmap 2021](#). This legislative platform endorsed by over 200 organizations addresses the harms that the criminal legal and immigration systems inflict on Black, Brown, immigrant, and low-income communities. The Justice Roadmap include:

- **Elder Parole** to provide incarcerated people aged 55 and older who have already served 15 or more years, including some of the state's oldest and sickest incarcerated people, an evaluation for potential parole release.
- **Fair and Timely Parole** to provide more meaningful parole reviews for incarcerated people who are already parole eligible and community ready.
- **Clean Slate** to automatically expunge old records and end perpetual punishment in New York State.
- **Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) for Incarcerated Students** to allow incarcerated college students to access state financial aid for higher education.
- **New York for All Act** to prohibit state and local officers from enforcing federal immigration laws, funneling people into ICE custody, or sharing sensitive information with ICE.

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