

Governor Hochul Announces Equity Agenda - New Racial Justice Initiatives Will Lift Up People of Color Throughout New York State (1/5/22)

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Governor Hochul Announces Equity Agenda

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New York's First Woman Governor Will Convene a Council on Gender Equity to Ensure Equal Rights

New Racial Justice Initiatives Will Lift Up People of Color Throughout New York State Governor Proposes Measures to Ensure LGBTQIA+ Individuals Are Treated With Respect

Governor Kathy Hochul today announced an Equity Agenda as part of the 2022 State of the State. The Equity Agenda will advance a wide-ranging plan to promote and support gender equity, racial equity, anti-hate, social justice, the LGBTQIA+ community, immigrants and new arrivals, and veterans with the goal of protecting the health, safety, economic opportunities, and fundamental dignity of every New Yorker—in short, to make the New York Dream into a reality.

"New York is recognized as the birthplace of movements for equality and progress, and I am committed to advancing our state's proud progressive legacy with a wide-ranging plan to promote and support gender equity, racial equity, anti-hate, social justice, the LGBTQIA+ community, immigrants and new arrivals, and veterans," **Governor Hochul said.** "My administration's Equity Agenda will both protect the fundamental rights of all New Yorkers and widen the opportunity for people of all backgrounds, beliefs, and identities to pursue the New York Dream."

The first component of Governor Hochul's Equity Agenda is focused on ensuring gender equity and equal rights. To do so, Governor Hochul will:

- **Create a Council on Gender Equity:** In 2017, New York launched the Council on Women and Girls to help state policies advance women's rights and equality. Governor Hochul will propose to transform that group into the Council on Gender Equity, expanding its scope and impact. Composed of Cabinet members and community leaders from across the state, the new Council will serve as an advisory body to the Governor, working to meet a vision of true gender equity in New York. The Council will take an intersectional approach to elevate the needs of women, girls, and transgender and gender nonconforming individuals, focusing on underserved populations and communities of color.
- **Protect Reproductive Access for All:** Building on her ongoing commitment to protect reproductive health and rights for all New Yorkers, Governor Hochul will take additional action to ensure anyone seeking reproductive care in New York has the access they need by expanding the family planning grant program, supporting safety-net providers, and codifying insurance coverage for abortion.
- **Pass an Equal Rights Amendment This Session:** Given the enduring inequalities that women, people of color, and other marginalized communities continue to face in employment, political representation, and economic opportunity, among other areas, New York must demonstrate its commitment to equality for all New Yorkers. Governor Hochul will work with the Legislature to pass an Equal Rights Amendment this session.

To ensure that New York State is a safe haven no matter who you are, where you come from, or how you worship, the Equity Agenda will promote anti-hate, racial equity, and justice for all New Yorkers. To

do so, Governor Hochul will:

- **Bolster the Nation's Strongest Anti-Discrimination Law:** New York's Human Rights Law was the first state anti-discrimination law in the country, and we were also the first to create a permanent agency enforcing antidiscrimination legislation. As coverage under the Human Rights Law has expanded and caseloads have increased in recent years, Division of Human Rights (DHR) funding and staffing levels have dropped or remained stagnant. This shortfall harms the quality of the agency's work, inhibits the agency's ability to take on new initiatives, lengthens investigations, and threatens the agency's ability to meet its targets for completing investigations under federal contracts. Additionally, there are opportunities to shore up gaps in the Human Rights Law to expand coverage further and improve access to the agency's complaint process. Governor Hochul will propose to expand the Human Rights Law to address these shortcomings to protect more New Yorkers.
- **Establish a Hate and Bias Prevention Unit to Improve Incident Response and Invest in Preventative Measures:** Governor Hochul will create a Hate and Bias Prevention Unit, housed within DHR, to provide a coordinated, rapid, and community-focused response to hate and bias incidents. The unit's general charge would include leading efforts around public education and outreach, serving as an early warning detection system in local communities, and rapidly mobilizing to areas and communities in which a bias incident or incidents have occurred.
- **Expand Benefits for Victims of Hate Crimes and Other Acts of Violence by Increasing the Cap for the Replacement of Essential Personal Property:** This proposal seeks to increase the capped reimbursement rate for Essential Personal Property (EPP). The current capped reimbursement rate is \$500 and has been the same amount since 1998. Over the past two decades, through inflation and other cost-of-living increases, this capped amount has become insufficient to meet the needs of a victim of crime in 2022 and often fails to make them whole for their EPP losses. Governor Hochul will propose amending the Office of Victim Services' (OVS) enacting statute to raise the cap for items of EPP from \$500 to \$2,500. While this proposal raises the financial cap, such items of EPP will be appropriately tailored and limited to those necessary for the health and safety of the victim. This will balance the needs of victims of crime with the finite, financial resources of the state.
- **Promote Equity and Economic Justice in New York's Cannabis Industry:** New York's legalized cannabis industry is in development, with the State expecting to issue licenses for adult recreational use. But the rise of what is estimated to be a \$4.2 billion industry must create opportunities for all New Yorkers, particularly those from historically marginalized communities. In support of that goal, Governor Hochul will create a \$200 million public-private fund to support social equity applicants as they plan for and build out their businesses. Licensing fees and tax revenue will seed the fund and leverage significant private investment.

Despite New York's utilization rate for Minority- and Women-Owned Businesses surpassing 30 percent, the state's MWBE program remains severely under-resourced relative to its demand and as a result faces several steep challenges. To build on New York's nation-leading support for MWBE's, Governor Hochul's Equity Agenda will:

- **Invest in Faster MWBE Certifications and Address the Backlog in Pending Certifications:** Due to a lack of resources and investment in the MWBE Program, for years the program has consistently received more applications than it was able to process, resulting in increased wait times for certification applicants. As a result, MWBEs awaiting certification miss out on opportunities in the awarding of ongoing state contracts and major new state projects. To address this problem, Governor Hochul will fund and direct Empire State Development (ESD) to expand its MWBE Division workforce dedicated to processing new and renewal applications, ensuring an adequate number of staff to both handle new incoming applications and prevent an additional backlog of applications from accruing.
- **Establish a Faster, Dedicated MWBE Appeals Unit to Address the Backlog in Appeals:** In conjunction with the efforts to streamline and support the certification process, ESD will also establish a new unit dedicated exclusively to processing administrative appeals, including challenges to the denial of MWBE certification. This action will allocate staff and resources to clear

the existing backlog of pending administrative appeals, while also retaining sufficient staff to handle incoming appeals in a more timely manner.

- **Promote Equal Access to Reduced-Rate Loans for MWBE Businesses:** The Linked Deposit Program¹⁸² helps existing New York State firms obtain reduced rate financing to make borrowing less expensive. Eligible businesses can obtain loans from commercial banks, savings banks, savings and loan associations, farm credit institutions, and Pursuit (formerly the New York Business Development Corporation). But while Linked Deposit is an essential economic development tool that has supported thousands of New York State businesses, there is a troubling lack of MWBE participation within the program. Of the \$2 billion in Linked Deposit participation, only \$116.5 million — or less than 6 percent¹⁸³ — has gone to MWBEs in New York State. Governor Hochul will expand eligibility under the existing Linked Deposit program to include Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), increasing access to reduced-rate loans for small businesses, including MWBEs.

LGBTQIA+ New Yorkers experience high rates of discrimination, family rejection, poverty and physical and mental health disparities. To protect New York's LGBTQIA+ community, Governor Hochul will:

- **Support LGBTQIA+ Health Services:** New York State has a longstanding commitment to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary community and has designated funding to support the work of the New York State LGBT Health and Human Services Initiative, including the network of organizations, over several administrations. Over time, that funding has been reduced as part of the budget process and must be appropriately funded to reflect a growing need. To support the LGBTQIA+ community Governor Hochul will support direct health services, cultural competency education and training, and organizational capacity building, ensuring that New York State, as the birthplace of the modern LGBTQIA+ movement, will continue to pave the way.
- **Ensure Gender-Affirming Treatment of Individuals in State Correctional Facilities:** Transgender, non-binary, and intersex people routinely endure harassment, violence, and discrimination while in correctional facilities. Nationally, transgender incarcerated people are nearly 10 times¹⁸⁴ more likely than the general prison population to be assaulted while incarcerated. To ensure consistent protections and fair treatment of transgender, gender nonconforming, and intersex New Yorkers in the criminal justice system, Governor Hochul will propose legislation requiring that incarcerated people in state and local correctional facilities be addressed and have access to commissary items, clothing, and other materials consistent with their gender identity. The Governor's proposal will ensure individualized and informed placement of incarcerated people that respects their gender identity while also establishing measures to protect the safety of incarcerated individuals.
- **Provide Gender "X" Options at All Public-Facing State Agencies:** The Gender Recognition Act (GRA), signed in June 2021, allows New Yorkers the option of an "X" gender marker on state driver's licenses. This important step helped ensure that all New Yorkers, including transgender and non-binary individuals, can have documents that accurately reflect their gender identity. But while many different State agencies collect information about gender, most are not covered by GRA's requirement to provide an "X" option when identifying their gender during an interaction with an agency. To ensure that New Yorkers can accurately express their gender identity when accessing more state services, Governor Hochul will propose an expansion of the GRA to require additional public-facing State agencies that collect gender information to include an "X" option.

Our state was built by immigrants and it is incumbent on New York to provide for them the support their contributions deserve. To strengthen immigrant services Governor Hochul will:

- **Increase Funding for the Liberty Defense Project:** The Liberty Defense Project is a public-private partnership between the Office for New Americans (ONA) and a statewide coalition of advocacy organizations and legal assistance groups to provide free legal assistance and representation to immigrants in New York State, regardless of immigration status. This program has been hailed as a national model for immigration representation. To strengthen this vital legal assistance for immigrants, Governor Hochul will increase Liberty Defense Project funding to

ensure not only the continuation of the program's current services but also the ability to serve more New Yorkers who need protections against federal immigration enforcement, fund new federal litigation efforts around immigration law, and increase social worker capacity to address difficult life circumstances for immigrant families and to smooth transitions when people are released from immigration detention. These actions would provide the strongest State-led and coordinated integration services in the nation.

- **Strengthen the Office for New Americans:** ONA was created in 2012 and exemplifies New York State's proud tradition as a beacon for immigrants. Through ONA, New York has led the nation in providing services for immigrant communities and has often filled the gaps where the federal government has been unable or unwilling to dedicate resources to new arrivals. ONA administers grant programs and oversees a network of community providers that help immigrant New Yorkers with everything from citizenship applications to workforce development. Currently, ONA operates 39 opportunity centers, offering services to more than 4.4 million new Americans living in New York. In 2020, ONA affiliates helped new Americans submit close to 2,250 citizenship and DACA applications, and the ONA network performed a cumulative total of nearly 1,300 legal consultation days for immigrant New Yorkers. Governor Hochul will increase ONA funding, enabling the agency to expand its critical services.
- **Codify Language Access Policy and Create a New Office of Language Access:** New York's statewide language access policy requires all executive State agencies that interact with the public to provide interpretation services in any language and to translate vital documents into the 10 most spoken non-English languages in the state, based on Census data. To build on and improve language access services for limited English proficient New Yorkers, Governor Hochul will establish a permanent Office for Language Access — just the second such office in the country, to Hawaii — that will be charged with coordinating and overseeing implementation of the statewide language access policy. Governor Hochul will also commit to the codification of a statewide language access policy, and the new Office for Language Access will provide important assistance in developing and implementing a strongest-in-the-nation language access law.

We owe our veterans a debt of gratitude for their service to our nation. To boost local veterans' programs, Governor Hochul will:

- **Reinforce Support for Local Veterans' Service Agencies:** Over the past decade, the complexity of the federal benefits system has increased significantly, and more veterans have needed to rely on professional assistance in pursuing their benefits claims and appeals. County veterans' service agencies provide these important services to veterans around the state, and deserve state resources to assist in this effort. To provide New York's veterans with the support they deserve, Governor Hochul will increase the minimum annual state funding for county and city veterans service agencies from \$10,000 each to \$25,000 each — a 150 percent increase.
- **Expand the Joseph P. Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Veterans' Support Program Statewide:** Created in 2012, the Joseph P. Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Veterans' Support Program supports veterans who are transitioning from military service to civilian life and facing challenges related to PTSD, traumatic brain injury, and depression. Currently, the State provides funding for Dwyer programs in more than 20 counties. Governor Hochul will fund the statewide expansion of this program to ensure that veterans throughout New York have access to this vital support.
- **Expand the Veterans' FreshConnect Program to Fight Food Insecurity:** New York's Veterans' FreshConnect Program provides additional funds to SNAP beneficiaries for farm market and farm stand purchases. Governor Hochul will expand the Veterans' FreshConnect Program by increasing funding by \$225,000, allowing the program to better serve the veteran population. Working with the Division of Veterans' Services (DVS), New York will allocate FreshConnect checks directly to county veteran service programs to significantly increase their reach and redemption rate.
- **Expand Rollout of Veterans' Welcome Center Kiosks:** Identifying veterans and bringing them into contact with their earned benefits is a challenge faced by DVS and veterans' service agencies across the country. To help reach more New York veterans, DVS developed a pilot plan for the development of touch-screen kiosks that allow users to securely and easily connect with

resources available to veterans and their families in New York. To expand access to this important service, the State will roll out more kiosks in more locations with large veteran populations across the state, with a focus on high-traffic regional welcome centers and transit hubs.

- **Support the Military-to-Civilian Transition Pathway:** Transitioning from military service to civilian life is often difficult for veterans, with increased rates of suicide, homelessness, unemployment, and criminal justice involvement the first year after military discharge. To ease this transition, the federal government has partnered with a nonprofit to develop the Expiration of Term of Service (ETS) sponsorship program, which helps veterans navigate this difficult period. Through the ETS, volunteer sponsors help veterans transition out of military service into their new lives. To help New York's veterans access this successful program, Governor Hochul will announce a statewide initiative to help ensure the presence of ETS sponsors in every county.
- **Extend and Enhance Tax Credits for Hiring Veterans:** The current Hire-A-Veteran Tax Credit program provides a tax credit for the hiring of qualified veterans for one year or more for at least 35 hours each week. But this program is currently underutilized due to unnecessary restrictions that limit its benefits. To support New York State veterans seeking work as well as business seeking to hire veterans, Governor Hochul will extend and enhance the Hire-A-Vet Tax Credit by expanding the definition of eligible veterans, removing the current distinction between disabled and non-disabled veterans, and allowing credits for the hiring of eligible veterans who work part time for at least one year.

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