

[NYAPRS Enews] NYS Legislature's Black, Hispanic, Puerto Rican and Asian Caucus Reject Kendra's Law Expansion, Backs CAHOOTs, Crisis Stabilization Centers and COLA

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📎 1 attachments (101 KB)

566683475-Caucus-Impact-Based-Ten-Point-Plan-for-Public-Safety.pdf;

The newly released [position paper](#) from NYS Legislature's Black, Hispanic, Puerto Rican and Asian caucus makes no reference to expanding Kendra's Law as part of this year's state budget and a newly posted [article](#) about it (see below) quotes Senator Julia Salazar as saying **"I don't think expanding Kendra's Law would directly address these underlying causes of public safety issues and wouldn't provide the comprehensive mental health services we want to see in our communities and communities that have been really most impacted by violence, as well as communities that have had the least access to mental health services in our state,"** said state Sen. Julia Salazar in an interview."

Following are the Caucus' mental health specific recommendations that prioritized the development of 'rapid response teams' (including the CAHOOTs model that our groups have been advancing that sends out teams of mental health and EMT workers in place of police first responders), the creation of Crisis Stabilization Centers and a COLA for the community behavioral health workforce, as follows"

1. Improve mental health services

New York's chronic failure to implement adequate mental health services has jeopardized the safety and well-being of our people. According to the Urban Institute, more than half of incarcerated people are experiencing mental illness, and people with unmet mental health needs are also especially vulnerable to becoming the victims of crime. This has become even more serious as many New Yorkers face new or worsened psychological challenges from two years of pandemic and isolation. However, in the United States, a person experiencing a mental illness is more likely to have contact with police officers than they are to get any support or treatment.

■ *The state does not currently have the capacity to address mental health crises as they occur. To incentivize local municipalities to invest in rapid mental health response teams, the state should implement the legislature's proposal to establish state and regional councils and regional response units for mental health emergencies. The Oregon-based Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets program (CAHOOTS) is an example of one such program, which dispatches one crisis worker and one medic to non-emergency calls. This program, launched in 1989 has seen great success, and has diverted thousands from the criminal legal system to treatment. This program, launched in 1989 has seen great success: In 2019, police backup was requested in only 0.6 percent of the estimated 24,000 calls to which CAHOOTS responded. The initiative has diverted thousands from the criminal legal system to treatment.*

■ *Right now, the state sends people who are experiencing mental health crises to either a jail or a hospital. New York should instead establish Crisis Stabilization Centers which are open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and provide rapid support services to anyone who walks through their doors. There, people are assessed, stabilized, and connected to appropriate services and resources. Such centers can also offer legal support, employment assistance, and connections to emergency housing.*

■ *New York must adequately fund and support behavioral health services to address mental illness and substance use disorder – including paying our frontline mental health care workforce adequate wages. For example, a 5.4% cost of living adjustment (OLA) for the human services sector is long overdue: 2021 was the first year that the sector received a COLA in over a decade, but even then it was at just 1%. We cannot expect to have better mental health outcomes unless we make these proper investments."*

Caucus lawmakers propose their own 10-point public safety plan for NY

By Nick Reisman City Of Albany Spectrum News March 26, 2022

Lawmakers in the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislative Caucus on Saturday proposed a 10-point plan for public safety in the state rooted in funding mental health, youth counseling and housing needs as well as diversion and educational programs.

The 65-member caucus carries power within both houses of the Democratic-controlled Legislature during the ongoing budget negotiations.

"These are initiatives we've been championing as a caucus, as individuals, for a long time because we know that for too long our communities have been enduring physical and psychological consequences of living with a constant presence of fear," said Assembly Member Michaëlle Solages, the caucus chair, in an interview on Saturday with Spectrum News 1.

The plan, she said, is meant to look "at the root causes of violence, the root causes of poverty, and tackling those issues in a holistic way" in order to end the "perpetual punishment of our communities."

Broadly, caucus lawmakers are calling for a range of measures meant to aid communities and reduce violent crime.

The proposed measures include:

- More funding mental health services and boosting wages for frontline mental health workers.
- More investment in youth programs like My Brother's Keeper and YouthBuild as well as after school programs with the goal of building communities and reducing recidivism
- Reduce wait times for mass transit both for the MTA as well as upstate transit programs
- Fund anti-gun violence programs in vulnerable communities
- Expand educational access through child care as well as at the public college and university level
- Provide public schools with psychologists and social workers
- Lawmakers are also calling for ways of reducing recidivism through diversion programs, boosting efforts for housing stability and spend more money for community centers.

The full plan can be found here.

Members of the caucus interview on Saturday said they had raised the issues with the public safety debate in Albany with the top Democrats in their conferences, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins. They have also spoken with Lt. Gov. Brian Benjamin, who has been a key negotiator for the Hochul administration.

"We are voicing our concerns, we are voicing them loudly," Solages said.

Baked into many of the proposals from caucus lawmakers is an upstream policy goal to reduce the high rate of recidivism in the state.

"We're not going to police our way out of this problem," said state Sen. Luis Sepulveda. "We have to look at the root causes and that's the way you solve them."

The 10-point proposal comes after Gov. Kathy Hochul has called for changes to New York's bail law that would expand the circumstances in which cash bail would be required, including gun crimes, repeat arrests and violent felonies.

Lawmakers and Hochul this month are negotiating a state budget plan that is due to pass by next Friday, and the governor has signaled a broad-based push for a range of criminal justice and public safety measures, including a sealing of many criminal records, money to implement evidence discovery changes and further reforms to the juvenile justice system.

She is also backing a long-sought proposal to restore access to the state's tuition assistance program to people in prison -- seen as a key way of cutting down on recidivism.

Hochul also called for an expansion of a law that requires people in a mental health crisis to receive treatment known as Kendra's Law.

"I don't think expanding Kendra's Law would directly address these underlying causes of public safety issues and wouldn't provide the comprehensive mental health services we want to see in our communities and communities that have been really most impacted by violence, as well as communities that have had the least access to mental health services in our state," said state Sen. Julia Salazar in an interview.

Speaking with reporters on Friday, Hochul said the state budget was the proper vehicle to achieve the changes.

"We're talking about serious policy initiatives in the budget, which is progress in itself and my sense is there's a need for — there's urgency," she said. "There's urgency out there."

Hochul's plan has received backing from local government officials in New York, including New York City Mayor Eric Adams as well as Democrats within the Legislature. Asian-American organizations and clergy have also signaled their support.

A debate over public safety measures is taking place against the backdrop of a rise in violent crime in New York and around the United States in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Republican lawmakers, as well as some Democratic elected officials, have called for measures meant to curtail concerns surrounding the issue.

Recent public polling has shown concerns surrounding crime and public safety are top issues for voters in New York statewide. Republicans have vowed to make public safety issues an election year issue; all statewide offices and the 213 seats in the Legislature are up for election this fall.

The initial bail law change was put in place in order to reduce the number of people waiting in local jails who cannot afford bail while their cases are yet to be adjudicated.

Supporters of the existing law have argued any effort to scale it back would hurt low-income people and people of color in the criminal justice system.

Reform advocates have rejected the link between the bail law's approval in 2019 and the rise in violent crime, pointing to the societal and economic disruption caused by the pandemic.

Lawmakers said they would be open to taking legislative action that is "evidence-based" in the criminal justice system.

"We don't want to have a political conversation," said Solages, the caucus chair. "We want to have a conversation in which our communities are made whole, because at the end of the day this is people we're talking about. These are peoples' lives. To us, this is serious. This is our family members, our neighbors [and] our community. This is real to us."