

Impact-Based Ten-Point Plan for Public Safety

Under the guise of advancing public safety, Governor Kathy Hochul released a ten-point plan to roll back modest reforms that will threaten hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers and fail to make our communities safer or healthier.

For too long our communities have endured the physical and psychological consequences of living with the constant presence of danger. Yet over and over again we are subjected to the same failed strategies.

Incidents of violence have increased while New York incarcerates a higher percentage of our people than almost any other democracy on earth, while bail costs for legally innocent people have continued to rise, and while we spend record amounts on policing and incarceration. Public safety is, quite literally, a matter of life or death, and we refuse to be appeased by pseudo-solutions that never kept us safe.

When communities are destabilized, and when we disinvest from the real solutions, crime goes up. When people's basic human needs are not met, crime goes up. When our criminal justice system prioritizes punishment over rehabilitation, crime goes up.

We will not stand by while the Governor plays politics with people's lives. We demand public safety measures that actually reduce violence and promote healthy, vibrant communities. New York must meaningfully and rapidly invest in the ten following evidence-based solutions.

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 (COLA) 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.

2. Invest in youth programs

Millions of children are left home alone after school hours, and these are the hours when violent juvenile crime peaks. We must set up our youth for success by providing subsidized programs and initiatives that foster community building, skill mastery, and innovation.

- Investment in afterschool programs, sports and therapy programming, and youth employment opportunities [significantly reduces](#) rates of arrest and recidivism. This year's proposed state budget does not go far enough in providing afterschool programming. New York must provide increased funding to the statewide afterschool network, and align the Empire State After-School Program to reflect the true cost rate for students.
- Nationally recognized programs like YouthBuild or "My Brother's Keeper" (MBK) are further areas where investment is needed. The national rate of recidivism for youth engaged in the juvenile or criminal justice system drops by approximately 60% for youth who have completed a YouthBuild program. MBK is another program that makes an investment in youth from early childhood into adulthood. Additionally, MBK provides enhanced programming for parents and guardians to learn how to navigate the school system and help prepare students for higher education. The state has hundreds of millions of dollars in Raise the Age funding for the purpose of supporting at-risk youth. It is imperative that these monies are allowed to fund programs that empower them with the tools for success.
- According to a report from New York City's Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence, approximately 37% of the young people who transition out of foster care in New York will either return to homeless services or end up in jail within two years. New York can offer increased rent subsidies and direct cash assistance — similar to the program recently implemented in California — to support young people transitioning out of foster care; programs like the Fair Futures initiative can further provide life coaches for foster youth aging out of the system, a proven strategy that helps youth get on the right path.

3. Expand violence interruption programs

Violence spreads like an epidemic, with unaddressed trauma and harm leading to cycles of retaliation and criminalization, harming bystanders and the surrounding community.

- Violence interruption programs prevent violence from spreading by partnering with trusted community members to provide rapid de-escalation and mediation in the immediate aftermath of a conflict. Where they exist, these data-driven programs have had extraordinary success in increasing public safety. On-the-ground organizations such as [Brownsville In Violence Out](#) and [Neighbors in Action](#) are doing the work to stop violence before it occurs.
- These programs can and must be expanded in this year's state budget to provide a credible, effective response to gun violence in the communities that are most vulnerable and impacted.

4. Decrease subway & bus wait times

Reductions in subway and bus service have left New Yorkers standing alone on the streets and in subway stations for long periods of time, especially in the middle of the night. This is an entirely inexcusable recipe for danger.

- Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the MTA has suffered from a shortage of workers and funding, and has been forced to further cut back and delay subway and bus services.
- New York must increase the frequency of buses and subways to ensure that New Yorkers reach their destinations safely (and on time). This year's budget must invest billions of dollars into transportation funding, including not just the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), but also funding for the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) and state operating assistance (STOA) funding to upstate transit systems. We can and should go much further than what has been proposed to expand safe systems of public transportation.

5. Improve access to education in high-risk communities

Lack of educational opportunity is directly linked to crime, yet New York currently allows access to key educational opportunities to be determined by parental wealth and zip code.

- Research has consistently shown that enrollment in child care is one of the most powerful weapons to prevent incidents of violent behavior. One study of children in Chicago found that participation in early learning programs reduced the chance of arrest for a violent crime by 70%. The ongoing loss of child care centers, significantly exacerbated by the pandemic, will have a lasting impact on our public safety and must be addressed by fully funding a path to universal child care.
- Similarly, New York must make higher education more accessible and provide undergraduate student support to the communities most vulnerable to violence through public universities like CUNY & SUNY.

6. Provide school social workers & psychologists

School counselors and social workers are an invaluable resource for increasing public safety – yet many New York public schools do not employ any full-time psychologists or social workers to guide our young people.

- School psychologists and social workers are uniquely positioned to help young people stay on a course for success and away from violence, identify and defuse conflict before it escalates into violence, and even catch potential mental health problems early on.
- New York must [guarantee](#) that all K-12 schools throughout New York State have a full-time licensed social worker and a full-time licensed psychologist on staff.

7. Reduce homelessness and housing instability

There are currently 92,000 homeless New Yorkers across the state, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, a concentration higher than that of any other area in the country and the highest rate since the Great Depression. Homeless people experience mental illness at higher rates and are significantly more likely to be victims of crimes, according to research in The Lancet public health journal. They are also more likely to be criminalized, putting them at heightened risk of violence during arrest and potential incarceration.

Addressing New York's housing crisis is not an easy task, but it is absolutely essential to our public safety. New York must take significant steps on this issue including by:

- Adequately funding public housing by including at least \$3.4 billion in capital funds for SFY 2023 and at least \$2.8 billion in operating funds to increase the size of NYCHA's Capital Projects Division, as well as an additional \$1 billion for public housing outside of New York City in the state of New York.
- Decreasing housing instability by passing the Good Cause Eviction bill, which protects tenants from baseless evictions.
- Helping people access housing by devoting substantial funding to the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP), which would create a permanent, statewide rental assistance program.
- Funding supportive housing programs that [reduce crime](#) and the likelihood of people who have past court involvement being rearrested.
- Funding Reentry Hotels, a program of transitional housing for people set to be released from jail or prison who would otherwise become homeless, particularly for the hotels that are slated to close at the end of June 2022; according to data from the New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, the rearrest rate for people staying in transitional hotels from March 2020 to July 2021 was [less than half](#) of that for all New Yorkers returning from prison or jail.

8. Invest in community revitalization

As the pandemic moved through New York, it dismantled the foundations of our communities and destabilized the neighborhoods that were most impacted by the virus. Those neighborhoods have seen a disproportionate rise in crime since the start of the pandemic, and reversing that trend will require investing in the strength and stability of those communities.

- Public community centers strengthen community bonds, foster positive and prosocial engagement in a community, and provide at-risk youth with impactful opportunities for engagement and advancement. Especially now, New York must invest in these centers and create new centers.

9. Expand the use of diversion programs and restorative justice

A rise in alcohol and drug addiction – made much worse by the COVID-19 pandemic – has trapped many New Yorkers in a cycle of crime that can only be stopped with programs that treat the underlying addiction.

- Judicial diversion programs provide drug or alcohol treatment, regular court appearances, and supervision by a judge to achieve this. These programs have been remarkably successful and can improve the safety of our communities: a review of five independent meta-analyses concluded that drug courts significantly reduce crime by an average of 8-26%, and as much as 35% for well-administered drug courts, as compared to traditional case dispositions. Moreover, these programs are more cost-effective: it can cost two to three times more for a person with serious mental illness to become involved in the criminal legal system than to receive treatment. Nonetheless, these judicial diversion programs are significantly underutilized.
- NYS SNUG Outreach (SNUG) is an evidence-based violence reduction initiative. The program seeks to address the issues causing high-risk individuals to engage in gun violence. SNUG also seeks to modify an existing norm of community acceptance of violent behavior from its citizens by engaging community residents, businesses, and community-based organizations to implement coordinated strategies to reduce and prevent shootings. The program employs and relies on Street Outreach Workers who live in the communities in which they serve, to act and be viewed as credible messengers by persons at high risk of offending.

10. Reduce recidivism

The U.S. has one of the highest recidivism rates in the world, with [76.6%](#) of incarcerated Americans rearrested within five years. Jail is not treatment and it does not address the causes of violence or prevent future violence. Instead, people who are exposed to police contacts and incarceration are further destabilized and traumatized. The existing criminal justice system not only fails to prevent harm and violence but is a proven source of both.

- According to a study by Harvard University, making educational and vocational programs available for incarcerated persons **reduces recidivism by up to 60%**. We must expand educational and vocational programs for incarcerated individuals, including higher education (e.g., the Bard Prison Initiative) and work/educational release programs.
- Incarcerated people who have more contact with their families and who report positive relationships overall are less likely to be re-incarcerated. To reduce crime, New York must enable incarcerated individuals to remain as connected to their families and communities as is possible and have visitation/communication policies that allow for interaction with family and loved ones.
- To the extent that people experiencing mental health issues become entangled with the criminal justice system, New York State already has a [lack of psychiatric beds](#) and jails are perpetually [in violation of court orders](#) to provide bare minimum services. New York State needs to immediately provide what is already required by law, and increase the number of psychiatric beds.