



**New York City Council Speaker Adrienne E. Adams  
2022 State of the City Address  
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery  
May 22, 2022**

Thank you all. Wow Tray – who knew in 2022 that this is where we would be?

Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to my first State of the City as Speaker of the New York City Council.

Thank you *all* for being here today.

Thank you to our faith leaders for the invocation, our wonderful performers, and our FDNY color guard.

And I want to especially thank Dr. Berenecea Johnson Eanes, President of York College. You and your staff have been incredible hosts, working with us to make today possible.

I want to thank my leadership team and all of my colleagues in the City Council for being here. It is an honor to work with each of you talented and passionate representatives, who bring your constituents into every room.

And of course, it is an immense honor to lead this City Council as the first Black Speaker in our city's history.

We have not only the most diverse Council in New York City history, but also our *first women majority City Council*.

I want to acknowledge Mayor Eric Adams, Comptroller Brad Lander, and Congressman Gregory Meeks, as well as former Council Speaker Gifford Miller. I want to also recognize my incredible friends in labor with us, especially Labor Strong.

And of course, I want to thank my family.

My husband Jay, our children and our beautiful grandchildren.

And my sister Tracey, who gave such a moving, heartfelt introduction.

Welcome to Queens, The World's Borough!

We have a population almost equally made up of Black, Asian, Latino and white New Yorkers. More than two million residents, nearly half of whom are immigrants. As the late Mayor David Dinkins said, we are “a gorgeous mosaic of race and religious faith, of national origin and sexual orientation.”

Hollis, Queens, where I grew up, was the home of Run DMC, LL Cool J, and legendary DJ Uncle Ralph McDaniels, creator of Video Musicbox!

The diversity of Queens makes it perfectly reflective of our entire city.

It also means our experiences mirror the greatest challenges New Yorkers face across this city.

New York City is at a pivotal moment, in year three of a global pandemic that devastated us.

Queens saw some of the worst impacts.

Elmhurst Hospital was seen across the nation as the COVID-19 epicenter, symbolizing how hard our city was hit.

And in every borough, neighborhoods facing barriers to health, housing, and opportunity have been among those most harmed by this pandemic.

The last two years have opened the eyes of all New Yorkers, and people across this country, to the deep inequities that undermine our safety.

It has never been clearer that communities cannot be safe when our health is under attack or out of reach.

COVID took the lives of over forty thousand of our family members, friends and neighbors. And it continues to take lives. Let us remember all those we have lost.

Our resilience helped us overcome the worst.

Yet, the impacts remain, whether they are the economic, mental health, or public safety challenges.

We now see how our individual health is tied to collective well-being.

Masks and vaccinations are not only to protect ourselves, but also each other.

That's a concept that extends beyond COVID, because health and safety are shared.

These lessons call for us to reimagine how we achieve safety for all New Yorkers.

By advancing our collective health.

And health is as much access to affordable housing as it is medical care; food security and nutrition; parks and recreational space in our communities; education, and of course, opportunity.

The well-being of all communities is intimately linked to our safety.

So many neighborhoods were in crisis before the pandemic, lacking the basic pillars of health.

The last two years have only worsened those conditions.

For a safer city, *we have to address that reality.*

You see – *we know* that strong communities are the safest.

When a community is healthy and well, it is a *powerful, resilient* force to overcome challenges and prevent crime.

That means people are living in good conditions. They have access to the necessary resources, dignity, and opportunity to reach their full potential and thrive.

That will be the focus of this City Council.

I know how important this is because it was my reality, growing up not far too from here. I was blessed to have the resources to thrive.

As the daughter of two proud unionized working parents, we were afforded economic stability, health care, and other crucial benefits.

I had access to quality schools, but like so many Black students in Hollis and St. Albans, I was bused out of my neighborhood to attend Bayside High School, as was Mayor Eric Adams, my high school classmate.

I was able to access CUNY, attending this very institution hosting us today, which led me to Spelman College and subsequent opportunities for economic mobility.

These were central for my ability to thrive, and it's how I stand before you today.

But for too many across the city, this is too far out of reach.

New Yorkers know what they, their families, and communities require to succeed.

It's time for us to listen and deliver.

The solutions are right in front of us.

They just haven't received enough focus or investment from our city.

The fundamental need is political will – to make the investments at scale and ensure effective implementation so they equitably reach communities.

Our city's budget must be the first down payment.

The Council's efforts will advance this vision to expand holistic health for all communities. Doing more than simply helping us recover from the pandemic, but building a better future for all New Yorkers to thrive and be safer.

## **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

The foundation of health for every neighborhood in our city is safe and stable housing.

Whether you are a homeowner or renter, living in Astoria, the Northshore of Staten Island, Parkchester, Midwood, or Kips Bay, the housing pressures are immense.

The City must expand investment in affordable housing in this next budget, with the \$4 billion addition to our capital plan.

Stability is out of reach when so many New Yorkers lack access to housing entirely, are severely rent-burdened, or housing insecure.

Leaders of this Council have been consistent voices on this issue. Land Use Chair Rafael Salamanca; Housing & Buildings Chair Pierina Sanchez; Public Housing Chair Alexa Aviles; and Progressive Caucus leaders Shahana Hanif, Lincoln Restler, Carmen De La Rosa, and Jennifer Gutierrez continue to sound the alarm on housing stability.

There is no path to address homelessness if we don't increase affordable housing.

Supportive housing should increasingly be the solution for those experiencing challenges with homelessness, mental health, and re-entry from the justice system.

This housing-first model, with on-site services to help individuals and families access health and stability, deserves support over excessive spending on congregate shelters that are frequently rejected.

Supportive housing has been shown to be more effective to solve homelessness, increase surrounding property values, provide construction jobs, and decrease crime.

Despite its ability to help ensure successful re-entry from the justice system, New Yorkers returning to communities have often been left out of eligibility. Deputy Speaker Diana Ayala has fought for expanding access to supportive housing, demanding the addition of \$28 million in the budget.

We have to curb the pipeline to homelessness from the justice system.

Affordable homeownership must also be essential to our housing plans.

Our city's small homeowners need our support.

In Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island, the racial diversity of homeownership is an asset to our neighborhoods.

Yet, rising costs pose a serious threat during these economically challenging times.

That's why the Council allowed the tax lien sale that hurt so many homeowners to expire. We will continue to protect our homeowners.

New affordable homeownership must be a key component of our housing efforts.

Just blocks from here, I was proud to help finance the new construction of affordable homes through a transfer of distressed property to the Interboro Community Land Trust. Mayor Adams and I recently broke ground on this project that will provide long-term, affordable homeownership to sixteen low-to-middle income households.

We need to expand these opportunities, using HDFCs and land trusts, leveraging newly enacted [state law](#) that doubles the subsidies available to us.

Let's help build equity and limit speculation in our neighborhoods, while supporting renters and creating homeowners through affordability.

## **IMPROVING PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH**

As we create a healthier housing landscape, the City has to deepen its investments to expand access to physical and mental health. After experiencing the greatest medical crisis of our lifetime, that starts with preventive care.

Too many in our city lack access to primary medical care, especially among Black communities, immigrant New Yorkers, and low-income and working-class neighborhoods. These are our neighbors who suffered the worst outcomes of COVID-19, with higher rates of infection, hospitalization, and death, largely due to having more pre-existing health conditions.

The lack of medical infrastructure to manage care in communities is an inequity that cost lives during the pandemic, and still does.

The City Council has called for new community health centers, operated by NYC Health and Hospitals, in areas that lack access to healthcare facilities. Majority Whip Selvena Brooks-Powers, Hospitals Chair Mercedes Narcisse and Health Committee Chair Lynn Schulman have been vocal advocates for the City to commit \$250 million of capital funding in this budget.

These centers, based on previously opened facilities in East Tremont, Jackson Heights, and Bushwick, provide [comprehensive services](#) that include pediatric and adult primary care, women's health, behavioral health, dental services, screening exams, and optometry.

We have advocated for one here in Jamaica, one in the Hunts Point or Soundview area of the Bronx, one in Brownsville/East New York, one in Canarsie, and another in Staten Island.

The City must prioritize medically underserved communities in the city budget.

And this is especially critical to address disparities in health care for women of color, specifically Black women, and LGBTQ and gender non-conforming New Yorkers.

We've seen a Supreme Court ready to undermine our rights to make decisions about our own bodies. We will not let that happen in New York.

The Council will release a comprehensive package of bills to protect and expand access to abortion and reproductive health care in the coming weeks.

Our rights must be sacred and safeguarded.

There's also more that H+H must do to ensure equitable access to care.

H+H should have to establish a capital plan, just like city agencies, no longer avoiding this requirement due to its status as a public corporation.

The Council will push for a capital plan focused on expanding access to care with transparent criteria to address the city's health inequities that led certain communities to suffer during the pandemic.

It's also no secret that one of the greatest impacts of this pandemic has been on the mental health of New Yorkers – whether it's individuals in severe emotional distress in our transit system, older adults suffering from isolation, or so many of us who live with its trauma.

We need to ensure that mental health treatment reaches those most in need, and is accessible to communities.

Let's expand programs that respond to mental health emergencies with professionals who provide appropriate care.

We also can't forget about communities most impacted by COVID, our older adults, and our students, whose mental health has suffered over these past two years.

The Council has prioritized \$11 million for mental health services for the 33 communities hit hardest by COVID, and mental health clinicians for 108 senior centers. This investment in the city budget is one we owe to communities, and certainly to our seniors, who are the jewels of our neighborhoods.

The mental health of our students must be paramount to supporting their educational success. The Council has called for nearly \$100 million to expand counseling and restorative justice. That is an initial investment we must make for our students in this budget.

We will continue to push for expansion of these essential resources until every school has the support for their students' academic, social, and emotional well-being.

Finally, we know that one of the barriers to mental health care for many communities is a lack of diversity in providers.

There are too few mental health professionals of color and those equipped to best support immigrant and LGBTQ+ New Yorkers. This is an obstacle to treatment and overcoming issues of stigma that we must talk about and confront.

The Council will support diversity efforts among mental health professionals to ensure greater access to care.

When we're talking about major health issues, we must talk about violence.

It's increasing here in New York, just like other cities across the nation since the start of the pandemic.

While the number of homicides is still lower than a decade ago, for any New Yorker, family, or community harmed by violence, the impact is far greater than numbers could ever convey.

Instead of a conversation centered on statistics, let's talk about the people most impacted by this disturbing trend.

Communities are traumatized.

Even when our city was touted as the safest in America, and crime headlines were absent from the news, the same communities that historically suffered from disparities and underinvestment were experiencing concentrated violence at high levels. Little or no attention was paid to them.

Those issues are not unrelated or coincidental.

Then and now, our city focuses too little on helping those most harmed by violence. It's why the same New Yorkers and communities most hurt by COVID are largely those most impacted by increased violence, and other negative health outcomes.

Violence is a public health crisis. Period.

We have to address the trauma that the pandemic and ongoing violence inflict on victims and families in our communities that experience it the most.

Too often, these victims of violence are talked about, but not substantially supported in their recovery.

The trauma left behind creates worse outcomes for people's overall health when it remains unaddressed, and only perpetuates cycles of violence. Helping communities recover from trauma *must be a priority*.

Many victims of gun violence in communities of color are blamed for their own victimization or simply disregarded. Access to victim services is often out-of-reach.

No longer will we allow the most harmed by violence to be the least helped.

The Council plans to establish New York State's first trauma recovery centers in our city, starting with at least one in each borough.

Trauma recovery centers – or TRCs – are a national model for investing in the recovery of underserved victims of violence. They ensure access to a range of wrap-around victim services that increase the likelihood of regaining health and stability, while stopping cycles of violence in our neighborhoods.

New York has fallen behind in serving all victims to stop cycles of crime, and it's time for our city to catch up.

We will bring TRCs to New York, help survivors recover, and reduce violence in our neighborhoods.

We also have to do more to successfully expand community-based programs that make a difference in preventing violence *before it occurs*.

Violence prevention and intervention programs that follow best practices have been shown to make neighborhoods safer. The City has made strides in growing our Crisis Management System, led in my own district by LIFE Camp, King of Kings Foundation, 100 Suits, and others. Violence interrupters put their lives on the line to promote safety and peace in our neighborhoods.

Critical programs like these should be brought to scale across the city towards achieving a greater impact. That takes not only increased resources, but also investments in capacity-building and planning that are too often overlooked.

The Council will bring together government stakeholders with national experts on violence prevention, including our local leaders, to develop a roadmap. We will chart the path to successful expansion of these programs as an equal pillar of our public safety infrastructure that reduces violence.

We will also invest in community-based safety programs that partner with the Crisis Management System and local precincts to ensure our neighborhoods are safer. Together, local organizations and precincts can facilitate non-policing interventions with young people most at-risk of violence.

As community leaders, it's critical that we support precinct leaders in the NYPD, who are invested in these proactive interventions with our youth that don't rely on over-criminalization. These are models for how we can most effectively advance safety in our communities.

Just as protecting New Yorkers from violence is fundamental to our health and safety, so too is providing food security and access to parks and recreational space.

Food insecurity remains a serious problem in our city, just as it was at the peak of the pandemic, when we witnessed extraordinarily long lines at food pantries.

A third of New Yorkers, including those with children in public schools, skip a meal daily because of a lack of money or resources. Nearly two-thirds find it harder now to afford groceries than before the pandemic.

The Council will continue to champion expanded access to school-based programs that provide meals to children and families and fight hunger.

And we certainly cannot forget about our immigrant communities and older adults.

This city budget must expand support for food programs that serve our seniors, like the Recovery Meals program and DFTA's home-delivered meals. Thousands of seniors are at risk of losing critical food assistance unless this budget adds \$40 million in funding.

I know I'm not alone in saying that I would never tell our precious seniors that they are not a priority.

This Council will also advance pilot programs to establish food pantries and provide fresh food boxes through schools or shelters in high-need areas, taking lessons from local mutual aid networks that delivered food to families during the pandemic.

There is so much we can learn from the last two years.

There is no clearer example than the role that parks and recreational spaces played for our City, as lifelines to communities.

Still, there are significant inequities that limit the ability for many New Yorkers to benefit, especially in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color.

Our Parks and Recreation Committee, chaired by Council Member Shekar Krishnan, recently highlighted these disparities' impact on our health. Areas with less access to parks had higher COVID death rates.

The City must expand parks and recreational spaces for neighborhoods in need of them.

The Council will push the City to develop new micro-parks and green spaces in underserved neighborhoods. Legislation that requires vacant and underutilized city-owned lots to be identified can help us create new sanctuaries and protect us from extreme climate events.

The Council will continue to push the City towards committing the \$3.1 billion budget investment in the Safe Streets program to expand open pedestrian spaces in neighborhoods. These can be game-changers for communities with some of the worst health outcomes in Central and Southeast Brooklyn, Southeast Queens, and the Bronx.

The City knows how to develop innovative recreational spaces. It just requires a commitment.

We see what's possible in the proposal to transform the beloved open street on 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Jackson Heights into a permanent linear park.

Let's give our families and community members new safe spaces, reimagining how we deliver health and happiness.

We have a real opportunity to expand recreational space and think big.

These investments are critical.

### **EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY**

And yet we know that one of the most singularly important tools to make New York healthier and safer is access to opportunity.

The opportunity for education and employment that supports careers and economic mobility. Opportunity to fully participate in our city through meaningful commitments to inclusivity.

We have secured unprecedented resources for career and technical education and summer youth employment in the budget.

But we have to go further.

Opportunities for young people cannot be confined to the summer months. Our young people exist year-round and need opportunities year-round.

As our Youth Committee Chair Althea Stevens says, we either invest in our young people on the front-end or the back-end.

Let's make the smart choice to expand youth employment and development programs to be all year long, especially for young people disconnected from schools and services.

All young people are a priority, whether disconnected, undocumented, or not. Their success delivers safety and brings a brighter future for our city.

Our proposed CUNY Reconnect program to re-attract former students of working age, who earned CUNY credits but left without a degree, will help advance economic mobility. It can reach thousands of New Yorkers, including the Black and Latina young women who disproportionately fall into this category, to increase their earning potential.

We must also increase access to civil service careers that have long been a pathway to economic stability for New Yorkers, including my own family.

The Council will expand these opportunities to New Yorkers who traditionally face obstacles.

In partnership with our municipal unions, we intend to advance legislation that provides access to civil service exams, preparation programs, and career information at Department of Correction, juvenile justice, foster care, and homeless services facilities, as well as schools and supportive housing sites. The City will also be required to work with reentry providers to ensure that people returning home from the justice system are able to access these opportunities.

By reaching New Yorkers transitioning out of these systems with opportunities to join the city's workforce, we can help them succeed. That's how we increase the stability of families and communities and improve public safety.

We must also expand opportunities for New Yorkers who too often get left out.

The nearly one million New Yorkers with disabilities have to be a priority. We can leverage shifts in the workplace landscape from COVID to address their higher rates of unemployment and underemployment.

Our recovery must be inclusive.

The Council will explore local laws and programs to advance employment opportunities, including those that encourage businesses to create more accessible workplaces.

We will also push the City to develop a five-year plan for improving accessibility and investment, similar to the Streets Master Plan.

By addressing these gaps, as well as the digital divide that remains prevalent across many communities, we can make a real difference.

Language access remains an entrenched barrier for 1.8 million New Yorkers with limited English proficiency. Despite our city having the greatest language diversity in the world, we have insufficient translation services. How is that *even possible*?

New Yorkers can't access key city services and opportunities. Small businesses are penalized for being out-of-compliance with City rules that *aren't even in their spoken languages*.

The City must expand language access in this budget through improved translation services, the creation of a Community Interpreter Bank, and by developing worker-owned translation cooperatives that provide employment and business opportunities for immigrant New Yorkers.

Investing in health and opportunity is our path forward – to safety and to an equitable recovery.

Our communities deserve greater investments that strengthen access to safety now. These are more than long-term solutions to public safety.

We stand on the shoulders of those who sacrificed and fought to lift us towards heights of equal opportunity. They are responsible *for where and who we are today*.

We have to ask ourselves.

What are we doing to ensure that climb continues?

We are committed to reaching for equity in the budget, securing stable housing for our neighbors, health and healing for the traumatized, aspirations for our youth, opportunity for all, and the ability to live and age comfortably in your community.

We must rebuild stronger communities.

We will ensure that health, opportunity, and safety are more than just words. That they are the reality for every New Yorker.

Let's fulfill the promise of those who elevated us.

Together, we will turn this vision into reality, now and for generations to come.

Thank you!