

2025 State of the City Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Briana, for sharing your moving story.

I want to acknowledge the presence of my beloved seniors from Rochdale Village - all the way from my district, The Great 28!

I'd also like to acknowledge San Juan Hill, the vibrant Black arts neighborhood that once lay beneath Lincoln Center and served as the foundation for the Harlem Renaissance.

By preserving their history, we honor their memory.

Thank you all for being here today at Jazz at Lincoln Center, a crown jewel of New York City's cultural institutions.

Our arts and cultural institutions are the heartbeat of our city.

The Council has, and will always, continue to support them.

Since 1987, Jazz at Lincoln Center has nourished generations of fans and musicians, building on a legacy that reflects our nation's rich history.

Dr. King referred to jazz as 'triumphant music,' for how it digests the hardest realities of life and turns them into hope.

Giants like Nina Simone, Max Roach, Louis Armstrong, and Billie Holiday used their music to call attention to the injustices that Black people and other marginalized groups faced.

They transcended the present to offer us a glimpse into the future, reminding us that it is through collective struggle that we can secure progress.

The wisdom that jazz offers us can be applied to all things, including how we govern.

As the great Wynton Marsalis recognized, jazz is a metaphor for democracy.

When we actively listen to each other, adjust, and work together, we can produce a collective song of solutions.

That is democracy in action, and it is how we can honor the diverse communities of our grand city.

When I first joined my Community Board in Southeast Queens, I had one intention – to give back to the community that raised me.

While there, I fought for equity in education, and against policies that would have shut down schools in our community.

I learned quickly that what often seems too big to change is possible when we work together.

That lesson stuck with me, and it has shaped how I lead our historic women-majority and most diverse City Council.

As a body of 51 representatives, we come from every corner of our city, each with unique challenges and priorities.

Yet, too often, our differences are used to divide us.

I know this well, and I imagine many of us here can relate.

Throughout my time in office, I've been labeled as a "moderate" in people's attempt to make sense of who I am.

But my focus has always been public service, which has no political label.

How we gauge policy solutions should be based on their effectiveness in improving the lives of New Yorkers.

We can find common ground if we choose to listen and work towards solutions together.

That's how I've led, and how we've successfully responded to some of our city's greatest challenges, like the housing crisis.

Since 2022, the Council has approved the estimated development of more than 120,000 new units of housing.

Staying true to our focus on working families, affordable housing represents more than half of all the private applications we approved.

We know inaction has a cost for everyone, but especially for working and middle-class New Yorkers struggling to remain in our city.

This urgency has driven us to advance comprehensive housing solutions, including my Fair Housing Framework Act, which reinforces the responsibility of all neighborhoods to produce more housing.

By changing the culture within the Council on land use, we created the expectation that all of us must participate in making our city more affordable.

When it came to the citywide zoning reform proposal, City of Yes, it was clear the plan could help address the city's housing crisis.

At the same time, the voices who opposed it were loud, and too many were disconnected from the conversation because the proposal did not speak to their needs.

I was determined for the Council to fill that gap and be a bridge towards progress.

Although there was every excuse to walk away, we charted a new path forward for the best interests of our city.

We heard from residents throughout the process and engaged all stakeholders, including those whose priorities were missing from the initial proposal.

Our City for All plan spoke to them – tenants, existing and aspiring homeowners, working-class New Yorkers, and communities in need of infrastructure investments.

We earned support by giving more New Yorkers a stake in the process and securing a historic \$5 billion for key investments.

Ultimately, City for All reflected the priorities of all residents.

The plan will enable us to preserve and develop more affordable housing, including NYCHA and Mitchell-Lamas, and promote greater homeownership opportunities while supporting existing ones.

It will also strengthen tenant protections and the housing agencies that do this critical work.

As a lifetime resident of Southeast Queens, and former Community Board Chair, I know our communities have significant concerns, like the lack of affordable homes and the rising cost of homeownership.

As City of Yes showed, confronting the housing crisis runs through outer-borough communities, which are often neighborhoods with working-class, Black, and Latino homeowners.

The best way we can advance solutions on housing is by meaningfully engaging and organizing within these diverse communities.

That is why I will release a Community Planning Framework to guide deeper engagement for successful housing and neighborhood development.

Organizing is hard work, but it is critical to achieving progress on housing.

Throughout my time leading the Council, I've often returned to one guiding question: "Is this what's best for New Yorkers?"

Even if we don't see the fruits of our labor, these seeds are still worth planting, just as our ancestors did for us.

Public service cannot be about our own glory or ambition.

Service is an intergenerational promise.

It's a commitment to each other, to our communities, and to our future to bring about the better world of our imagination.

That is what this moment in our history demands of us.

As a legislative body, the Council can pass laws and fund programs. But we don't control their implementation.

And while we may not have the same resources as the mayoral administration, we have been creative in producing solutions to our city's biggest challenges – from maternal mortality to child poverty.

These solutions are models that can be scaled for greater impact.

In addition, we have focused on fixing the inefficiencies in our city's services, like the barriers that keep New Yorkers from accessing CityFHEPS housing vouchers.

Yet, the Administration has refused to implement them, and homelessness remains at record highs.

Every day without action is another eviction, and another family stuck in the shelter system.

The purpose of government is to work through our most pressing challenges.

Why lead if your default is to insist that something is too hard, or that we just can't do it?

Why not try to help New Yorkers?

Last year, I called attention to the bureaucratic obstacles in how CityFHEPS is administered.

Today, we are releasing a set of administrative improvements that the City can enact to improve access to housing vouchers.

We must also take steps to address other rising costs working-class New Yorkers face every day.

Public transit is the lifeblood of our city. Yet, far too many are still struggling to afford the fare.

That's why, year-after-year, the Council has made it a priority to expand Fair Fares, which now serves over 360,000 New Yorkers.

We know even more residents need this support, and we won't stop fighting until we reach those at 200% of the federal poverty level.

As we expand opportunities for residents, we must protect the diversity that powers our city.

The Trump Administration's cruel crusade against immigrant families, within a nation of immigrants, is threatening our democratic values.

New Yorkers are already feeling the consequences of Trump's mass deportation plans.

In Queens, several small businesses have reported as much as a 50% drop in sales since the inauguration.

Employees and customers are staying home out of fear.

None of this helps our city.

The Administration's attempted erasure of LGBTQIA+ communities, Black, Latino, and Indigenous histories, of the very people who built this country, is meant to sever the bonds between us.

They are counting on our despair and our inaction.

What a grave mistake.

Trace any of our histories. Apart from Indigenous peoples, everyone here arrived from someplace else.

Our African, Asian, Caribbean, European, Latino, and Middle Eastern communities are woven into the fabric of our neighborhoods.

Trust that we will fight to protect them.

In response to Trump's war on families, the Council launched the Protect NYC Families Initiative, which funds legal services, know-your-rights education, and rapid response efforts.

We convened a New Arrivals Strategy Team, which identified gaps and best practices to strengthen our communities.

Now more than ever, we must protect our city's immigrant families so that New York City can remain a place of opportunity.

In his quest for power, Trump is willing to burn everything in his way.

But a house built on ashes will fall.

We've been through the fire before.

We'll make it through again by defending our city and fighting for each other.

Three years ago, I became the first Black Speaker, mother, and grandmother to lead the New York City Council.

I was proud to break open that door and lead the first women-majority, and most diverse Council that our city had ever seen.

It meant that for the first time, our city's lawmaking body reflected the rich diversity of our communities, making decisions from the perspectives of women who sit at the intersection of our city's greatest challenges.

Our city is stronger because of it.

To my colleagues in service: Diana, Amanda, Selvena, Justin, Keith, Carlina, Rafael, Sandra, Chris, Erik, Julie, Gale, Shaun, Yusef, Carmen, Eric, Kevin, Kristy, Pierina, Oswald, Althea, Vickie, Francisco, Tiffany, Linda, Jim, Shekar, Julie, Nantasha, Lynn, Bob, Joann, Lincoln, Jen, Crystal, Chi, Sandy, Alexa, Shahana, Rita, Darlene, Chris, Susan, Farah, Mercedes, Inna, Kamillah, and David – thank you for your partnership and work together over these years to fortify the institution of the Council.

As mothers and daughters, advocates, and lifetime stewards of our communities, we know – our fate is not in the hands of anyone else, but our own.

We are our own constituents.

This has enabled us to legislate differently, investing in communities that have been overlooked and addressing issues, like maternal mortality, that have disproportionately harmed people who look like us.

Here in New York City, Black women are six times more likely to die of pregnancy-related causes than our white counterparts.

These deaths are not accidents; they are a disturbing pattern of injustice.

As a government, we are responsible for the preventable loss of each precious life.

The disparities in maternal mortality are a product of medical and structural racism that make access to adequate health care and stability out of reach.

Too often, low-income, Black, and other women of color have their pain and symptoms dismissed, leading to delayed diagnoses and insufficient care.

My own mother was one of these women.

Her pleas for help were ignored, and she was forced to give birth to me alone on a gurney, in a corner of the hospital.

It is a miracle that we both survived.

Decades later, my mother's experience is still far too common.

In my State of the City address two years ago, I announced that the Council would help expand guaranteed income pilots to support New Yorkers facing our toughest challenges.

We made good on this promise. We changed the law and created a new budget initiative to support mothers facing housing insecurity.

The Council made history by funding an unconditional income program to combat poverty – the first time city funds were used for this purpose.

With this initial investment, we are supporting 161 mothers and their children to secure a better life – like the brilliant Briana who spoke earlier today.

Mothers from the Bridge Project, will you please rise!

These supports are even more critical as poverty continues to rise, affecting one out of four New York City children.

We have the resources to improve maternal health, reduce child poverty, and ensure that all families can lead healthy lives.

We can, and we must.

While recognizing some progress secured through free doula care in underserved communities, and maternal mental health support, there are limitations to what can be achieved through lawmaking alone.

That's why I convened the Council's Maternal Health Steering Committee, comprised of stakeholders in government, advocates, providers, and other healthcare workers to deliver comprehensive solutions.

We each hold a piece of the puzzle.

Women with the highest risk of maternal mortality are the same women who have been locked out of equitable opportunities.

Imagine a young woman of color who is barely making enough to survive in New York City.

The compounding stressors from the inequities of poverty, racism, and sexism are already working against her every single day.

Now, imagine carrying these stressors into one of the most dangerous and difficult periods of life.

Maternal health requires that we not only address physical care, but also the broader determinants of health — accessible housing, mental healthcare, poverty, and safety.

Confronting the issues that contribute to maternal mortality will help us answer related challenges.

We owe it to our mothers — without whom there is no life — to marshal political will, work together, and get this right.

This Council has made early childhood education our priority because we know that a robust and affordable system is essential to children's development, our economy, and New Yorkers' ability to remain here in our city.

We've been consistent in fighting for a comprehensive approach to fix the system that denies access to too many families and also leaves it underutilized.

For families with children ages two and younger, childcare remains a major expense and challenge.

We need increased funding in the state budget for childcare vouchers to make up for diminished federal support.

This can prevent thousands of eligible children from losing access.

At the same time, thousands of families currently earn too much to qualify for assistance and too little to comfortably afford care.

The city budget should fund childcare for more of these families, with subsidies that cover half the cost of care.

We can ease the strain on working parents.

As we invest in early childhood education, we need to do the same for adults seeking to continue their education.

I was proud to establish and fund CUNY Reconnect, a program that helps working-age New Yorkers return to college, graduate, and advance their potential.

When I think about the lives changed through this initiative, I think about my own father who returned to York College years after he began to complete his degree.

I still remember his beaming face, and how proud he was to finally achieve his dreams.

In three short years, CUNY Reconnect has helped over 47,000 students re-enroll.

But we can't stop there.

Its overwhelming success demands that we make the program permanent by baselining it in the budget.

We can also eliminate a major financial barrier by clearing old unpaid balances of up to \$1,000 for former students to successfully re-enroll.

We must also extend the benefits of CUNY ASAP, which has more than doubled the timely graduation rates of part-time students in Associate Degree programs.

To help low-income students, the City should fund more application fee waivers and expand CUNY's ACE program that provides academic and financial support.

And while students work hard to complete their degrees, we must do our part as government to strengthen the civil service pipeline that offers pathways to upward mobility.

Historically, it's what allowed many New Yorkers, including my own family, to reach the middle-class.

These are good jobs, and filling them can fix the understaffing in our city agencies.

It's a win for our city, and for New Yorkers looking to serve their communities.

Here in our city, great potential exists on every single block.

Yet, some of our best ideas never see the light of day because of the lack of access to capital and support.

Growth happens where we water it, so let's tend to our city's entrepreneurs and help them flourish.

There are around 20,000 Black-and Latino-owned businesses across the five boroughs, but too few ever grow into medium-sized or large-scale businesses.

With a little help from the city, we can change that.

I'm announcing a plan to create the NYC Minority Business Accelerator, to provide strong, individualized business strategy and improve access to capital.

Most importantly, the accelerator can help our businesses secure more investment from major regional companies to support their expansion.

When our small businesses thrive, so do our neighborhoods.

Our city's nonprofits also need our attention. They provide essential services that support New Yorkers at every stage of life.

Yet, payment delays in the City's contracting process threaten their survival.

Today, I'm proud to announce legislation to require payment of awarded funds to nonprofits earlier in the process.

This will free nonprofits to focus on their missions—not on struggling to pay their staff or chasing down the dollars they're owed.

The challenges that many communities face are intertwined – a lack of health and opportunity affects a community's overall sense of safety and stability.

With the right investments, community centers have the potential to be neighborhood hubs of health and safety.

This year, the Council will work to establish a new model for holistic centers. They will provide community access to mental health and physical healthcare, wellness, and recreational space.

We intend to start in Southeast Queens, my home, by creating a major new facility in partnership with a local library branch.

This Council will always defend our libraries.

When libraries were on the chopping block during the last budget cycle, we mobilized to secure their restoration.

Despite our success, not enough neighborhoods have access to seven-day service.

Today, I'm announcing a plan to add seven-day service to ten new branches across the city, while addressing the outstanding needs of our library systems.

And we cannot forget about our parks, which are a lifeline for New Yorkers.

Our parks need a full restoration in funding, and we will continue our push for parks funding to reach closer to one percent of our city budget.

As Council Member Brewer has consistently advocated, we must expand public access to school playgrounds to maximize their utility.

We can improve thousands of lives by capitalizing on what already exists.

Healthy communities are those with investments.

It is no surprise, then, that neighborhoods experiencing high levels of violence are the least likely to have access to resources needed for healing and stability.

In our pursuit of public safety, we must listen to the communities that have been persistently harmed, including survivors of crime and violence – from the young Black students who must learn to follow a different set of rules to be safe, to the mothers who worry for their sons and daughters.

Our city must be one where all of us are safe.

For years, and still today, communities of color have been deprived of their right to safety because of government's inability to commit to real safety solutions.

People want mental health services, job opportunities, and resources.

Too often, racism enables dehumanization, where Black people and other people of color are denied recognition as victims when subjected to acts of violence.

And trauma, when left unresolved, ripples through our communities, perpetuating cycles of crime and violence.

A recent survey of crime victims in our city found that most victims never received the support they needed.

Understanding this, the Council has pioneered an innovative approach to victim services that has been growing in use across the nation.

We established New York State's first Trauma Recovery Centers in our city. This ensures underserved crime survivors are supported in their recovery.

These centers can become a pillar of our public safety system.

By focusing on victims' recovery from trauma, we can make neighborhoods safer.

But the Council cannot do this work alone.

These vital centers should be made permanent and scaled up with funding contributions from the mayor's office and state government.

The city must also stop relying on its jail system as a substitute for mental health care infrastructure.

Half of the people in city jails have a mental health diagnosis. It's how we end up with Rikers as the city's largest mental health facility.

As victims of crime recognize, incarceration worsens mental illness and leaves people stuck in cycles of distress.

There is no shortcut to making the necessary investments at scale to improve mental health outcomes.

We need more community-based care, rather than treating mental health issues by relying on emergency and traditional public safety responses.

This requires addressing the persistent waitlists for key solutions, like forensic psychiatric beds, mental health courts, residential programs, and mobile teams.

If we truly want the best for New Yorkers, we need to ask ourselves: Are we willing to invest in their care?

Rikers is a stain on our city that makes us all less safe, from correction staff and those detained, to New Yorkers in every single neighborhood.

Crime victims recognize this.

90 percent of crime survivors support moving people in need of mental healthcare from jail to treatment facilities, and 75% want an expansion of alternatives to incarceration.

In the upcoming days, Judge Lippman and the Independent Rikers Commission 2.0 will release its report outlining the actions and investments the City must make to close Rikers.

Lives are at stake.

The Administration cannot shrink from its responsibility. It must follow through on these commitments.

As a leader of this city, let me address the outrage and sorrow that many of us feel at this moment as our democracy faces existential threats from within.

It is up to us to counter the tyranny taking root at our federal level, and right here in our own backyard.

We must be vigilant against it and utilize every tool to strengthen our democracy.

That's why we convened a Charter Revision Commission, with members appointed by every city elected official, to strengthen government through greater transparency and accountability.

Democracy isn't owed to us, and it isn't freely given.

We must be willing to fight for it, every single day.

That fight may be difficult, but that's why we must root down in our communities, and work to preserve it.

We're part of a long legacy of governing this city.

New York City is bigger than one person, and our city deserves leadership that prioritizes its people over individual glory or interests.

We need solutions more than slogans, service rather than saviors, and partnership over patriarchy.

The dignity and trust in government leadership has been shaken in our city, and it must be restored.

If we remain true to our values and stay united, we will not only overcome the challenges of today, but also advance the progress each of us deserve.

While those attempting to destroy our democracy would have us believe that our downfall is inevitable, it is not.

Despite the gloom of these times, I do have hope.

You see, I was born during the Civil Rights Movement to parents from the South.

I remember the hope that Dr. King inspired, and the grief that followed when he was stolen from us.

It felt as though the world had ended, and change was no longer possible.

I share this to remind all of us – we have faced similar moments in our democracy before, where hope felt beyond our reach.

But still, we stand.

Our existence is proof of our power as a united people.

In the aftermath of Dr. King's death, the collective grief we shared clarified our values and strengthened our resolve to fight for each other, and for our future.

Because hope is the result of hard work; it is action in the face of despair.

Together, we imagined and struggled for a better world.

That critical work happened on the ground, in communities, led by our neighbors, local leaders, and everyday people.

The answers came from each other.

That remains true today.

We each bear responsibility now for protecting our city, each other, and the foundation of our great democracy.

This is the toll we pay for our time on earth.

New York City's greatest strength is our diversity, our resilience, and our people.

We are New Yorkers, and our collective power cannot be defeated.

What seems too big to change becomes possible when we tackle it together.

That is our role as leaders of the city: to unite people, despite our differences, to achieve what we cannot do alone.

This is how we move forward.

This is how we build the stronger city and the better future that all New Yorkers deserve.

This is how we show New Yorkers and the nation what the land of the free and the home of the brave truly looks like!

Thank you!