



**OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT**

**ANTONIO REYNOSO**

Brooklyn Borough President

June 3, 2024

Dear Speaker Adams,

As the FY2025 budget negotiations enter their final days, I am writing to express my support for a set of proposals that I believe will foster a more equitable city where all New Yorkers can thrive. I am very pleased that the Council has already supported the majority of these proposals in its budget response and subsequent hearings, and I want to thank you for your leadership through a particularly trying budget cycle that has involved many unnecessary cuts to critical programs.

At the end of last year, my office released The Comprehensive Plan for Brooklyn, which examines the deep interrelationship between land use, budget allocations, City policies, and public health. Analyzing data across multiple metrics, the Plan identified patterns in which low-income neighborhoods of color are less likely to have access to safe and affordable housing, reliable transportation, quality educational and employment opportunities, active recreation, and preventative health services. In conjunction with higher levels of policing and incarceration, this leads to worse outcomes in these communities across nearly every health metric. We know the solutions, and they are deeply tied to how we allocate our resources. To address this, we must:

**Increase funding for preservation and development of affordable housing.** It is no secret that we are in a housing crisis. I've been a vocal advocate for development across the income spectrum, but developing new income-restricted housing and keeping people in homes they can afford are both critical pieces of the puzzle. I support the Council's ask for increased capital for both HPD to support new development and for NYCHA to support critical repairs, especially the Vacant Unit Readiness Program. It is unacceptable that more than 5,000 NYCHA apartments are sitting vacant while thousands of families sleep in shelters. I also support the Homes Now/Homes for Generations proposal, to infuse much-needed funding to HPD's stalled Neighborhood Pillars and underutilized Open Door programs. \$2.5 billion over four years will allow thousands of New York City families to access permanently affordable rental and home ownership opportunities.

**Restore Youth and Education programs.** Due to the expiration of federal COVID relief funding, our schools are facing difficult choices unless we step up to support them. I thank the Council for prioritizing youth and education programs that serve our 915,000 students and families, with a priority for students with the most need.

- **Early Childhood Education:** Access to free and low-cost childcare can make the difference between a family staying in New York City or being forced to leave. It is essential that these

programs remain available to every family, regardless of special needs or immigration status. Yet even with some funding restored, large gaps remain in our ability to provide universal access. I appreciate the Council's ongoing advocacy and encourage you to increase the ask to \$300 million to restore and expand these critical programs. In addition to a restoration of \$170 million for Early Childhood Education funding (with a goal of reaching true universal access to Pre-K and 3K seats), this includes: allocation and baselining of an additional \$45 million for Full Day/Full Year seat expansion; an additional \$10 million for marketing and outreach funding; \$40 million to restore and baseline Pre-School Special Education; and \$25 million in baselined funding for Promise NYC to provide childcare vouchers for undocumented children and families.

- **Community Schools:** Community Schools play a critical role in supporting 21st-Century learning. The more than 100 community schools in Brooklyn transform communities and provide vital wraparound services to children and their families. While the administration restored some proposed cuts, a budget gap remains. An allocation of \$14 million would help address both the cuts and the expiration of federal funding.
- **COMPASS:** The COMPASS program provides students in elementary through high school with access to after-school programs that provide critical opportunities for our youth to spend time productively, and for working parents to save on the cost of childcare. Yet the administration proposes reducing COMPASS seats by 3,538 slots annually from 2025 to 2027. They cite underutilization as the reason for these cuts; however, providers report having waitlists for their existing seats.
- **Restorative Justice:** While DOE has seen an uptick in hate crimes and bullying, this administration is proposing cuts to initiatives that center empathy, healing, and accountability. Punitive measures alone have never made our schools safer. I support the Council's call for \$22 million to restore and expand these programs.
- **Public school capital improvements:** I was happy to see \$4 billion identified for new seat construction and for more than 7,000 new seats specifically to be built for Brooklyn by 2027. Yet we must address overcrowding and make further investments in meeting class-size compliance for future years. With billion-dollar need projections according to SCA and DOE officials, we must thoughtfully approach building new spaces and implementing the recommendations of the Class Size Working Group.
- **CUNY:** I support the Council's call for a restoration of \$40 million in cuts and additional investments into CUNY programs.

**Support programs that increase equitable health outcomes across the city.** As you know, right now Black women in New York City are eight times more likely to die of pregnancy-related complications than their white counterparts, and people of color are less likely to have access to mental health services. This budget must include:

- **Maternal health services and mental health support:** I support the Council's calls for \$500,000 in additional funding for maternal and child health services, and for baselined funding of \$5 million to provide mental health professionals within each NYC Health + Hospitals maternity department. However, on the advice of my Maternal Health Task

Force, I encourage the Council to allocate this funding to hiring psychiatrists rather than psychologists, because in addition to providing mental health treatment, psychiatrists can prescribe needed medications.

- **B-HEARD:** Up to half of people who become victims of police violence have a mental health challenge, yet 911 continues to be one of the primary options for responding to people in mental health crises. Individuals with an untreated mental health issue are 16 times more likely to be killed during a police encounter compared to those who encounter police for other issues. Programs like B-HEARD help triage care to mental health professionals as first responders to ensure that New Yorkers suffering from mental health crises are treated with a trauma-informed and culturally competent approach, preventing avoidable deaths. A divestment in this program could impact continued program expansion.
- **Mental Health Service Corps:** This program integrates behavioral health into a variety of settings including primary care, women's health, pediatrics, and other non-behavioral health care settings, and proposed cuts are likely to affect the number of providers in the program. Since its launch in 2020, the program has provided over 2,700 New Yorkers with mental health services at 48 clinical sites in the Health + Hospitals system, including 76% located within areas with federally-designated mental health professional shortages. I encourage the Council to restore proposed cuts to this program.

**Ensure New Yorkers have access to vital community services.** This includes:

- **Cultural institutions:** While the administration restored some funding for our cultural institutions, they still face large cuts. These cuts have the most outsized impact on small non-profits and organizations run by and serving people of color, which are often called upon to serve their communities in myriad ways other than just arts programming. These cuts also impact the anchor institutions of the CIG, cutting into programming that serves communities citywide, especially our youth. I support the Council's call to fully fund these institutions.
- **Libraries:** Mayor Adams recently called libraries "a lifeline to countless communities and the great equalizer," yet the cuts they are facing have already limited their opening hours and could reduce them further. I support the Council's call for \$58.3 million to restore cuts and reinstate Sunday service.
- **Adult literacy:** Even before the recent influx of migrants to our city, more than 20% of New Yorkers reported speaking English "less than very well." Now is not the time to allow cuts to programs that help immigrants connect to critical services, employment opportunities, and more, yet proposed cuts would mean 2,000 fewer students served by these programs compared to recent years. I support the Council's call to restore and baseline an additional \$10 million to fund adult literacy programs, increase the per-student service rate, and expand the geographies designated for funding.

**Support a greener, healthier city.** The City and State have both set ambitious goals for meeting our climate emergency by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resiliency to extreme weather. The City's budget must reflect these priorities, including:

- **Community Composting:** This program diverts millions of pounds of food waste from landfills every year; provides free compost to the Parks Department, community organizations, street tree maintenance, school gardens, Botanical Gardens, and community gardens; creates jobs; and plays a critical role in educating youth and the public about the value and mechanics of composting. I appreciate the Council's continued advocacy for the full and expeditious restoration of these programs.
- **DSNY staffing, outreach, and contracts:** I am very disappointed by the cuts to DSNY's budget for outreach and communications, and the unexplained cut of 321 civilian administrative positions in FY2025. This year, DSNY will begin to implement one of its most transformative programs, Commercial Waste Zones. It will also finalize the rollout of citywide curbside organics collection and begin requiring residential building owners to containerize their trash, and it should be starting on the next Solid Waste Management Plan (to be completed in 2026). All these programs are complicated and require significant planning, oversight, and –most critically – public engagement in order to be successful. Additionally, according to the MMR, the city's curbside and containerized recycling diversion rate actually went down this year to just over 16%, well short of DSNY's goal of 23%, which itself is lower than that of many other major cities. Education and outreach are critical to getting this number up. I urge the Council to advocate to restore cuts to outreach, education, consultant contracts, and staffing at DSNY.
- **1% for Parks:** Over 400 NYC advocacy organizations have joined together to call on the administration to allocate 1% of the City's budget for Parks (up from the current 0.6%), and I hope you will support this ask. This increase would support adequate staffing, maintenance, greening, and programming to make our parks safe, clean, and welcoming for the millions of New Yorkers who rely on them every day.
- **Implementation of the Streets Plan & Vision Zero:** Since 2019, DOT has had a mandate from the City Council to implement its Streets Plan, which requires 150 miles of protected bus lanes, 250 miles of protected bike lanes, and safety upgrades to thousands of intersections over five years, all in support of the goals of Vision Zero – to end traffic violence and make our streets safer for all users. Yet they are falling deeply behind on implementation, and 2024 is now on track to be the deadliest year on our streets since Vision Zero began. The administration, however, is proposing cuts to traffic and streets operations, as well as to Vision Zero education and outreach. Now is the not the time to back off our obligation to safe streets, and I encourage you to support DOT's mandate, both through the budget and through ongoing advocacy.

**Reinvest the bloated Department of Correction budget into programs that provide alternatives to incarceration and reduce recidivism.** While DOC anticipates a reduction in headcount over the next four years, they have yet to account for rightsizing their headcount in conjunction with closing Rikers, which they are mandated to do by 2027. Beginning consolidation of facilities on Rikers would significantly reduce overtime spending. Additionally, if DOC were to terminate only half of the 1,029 officers it reported in March as chronically absent, it could save over \$55 million. This funding should be reinvested into programs that reduce unnecessary incarceration, many of which the Council already supports, including: Alternatives to Incarceration and Re-entry Programming, Supervised Release, Justice-Involved Supportive Housing (JISH), adequately

staffing the Board of Correction, and actively planning for the next phase of Rikers Island: Renewable Rikers.

**Increase funding for community boards.** Community boards are a critical link between the public and City government, weighing in on important issues that impact everything from small businesses to street safety to the availability of affordable housing. Yet currently, the boards and the entities responsible for supporting them (the Borough Presidents' offices and the Civic Engagement Commission) are underfunded and understaffed to carry out their Charter-mandated duties. In the long term, I support the creation of an Office of Community Boards to provide necessary support. In the meantime, increasing the boards' budgets would allow them to comply with State law requiring livestreaming meetings, acquire technical assistance in land use planning, improve human resources practices, and more.

This list is by no means comprehensive, and simply seeks to highlight a few priorities in the larger budget conversation. I thank you again for your leadership and your support of these and other important policies. Please don't hesitate to reach out as budget negotiations continue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Antonio Reynoso', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Antonio Reynoso  
Brooklyn Borough President