



## New York City Council



# Speaker's 2016 Annual Report

BUILDING A STRONGER NYC

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Equity must be the cornerstone of our policies, the way we govern, and how we meaningfully engage diverse communities. We spent the past year working to build a city that stands on the strength of inclusion and diversity.

In 2016, my colleagues and I ushered in landmark legislation and budget initiatives to create sweeping change and improve the lives of New Yorkers of all backgrounds. We worked in leaps, not steps, to address systemic racism by funding alternatives to incarceration programs and reforming the way our criminal justice system penalizes people for low-level, non-violent offenses. Previously, thousands of New Yorkers were unnecessarily marked by a permanent record and detention time, and police resources were diverted from more serious crimes. Our reforms have created a more equitable and efficient system.

We introduced measures that value and protect a range of workers – from caregivers to freelancers – as we bolstered services for seniors, immigrants and LGBT youth, among other vulnerable communities. Our collaborative Young Women’s Initiative led to an unprecedented \$20 million commitment to address disparities for girls and teenagers of color – a model that other cities are emulating.

My colleagues and I took action to protect our neighborhoods. This included requiring that the City evaluate the effectiveness of tax breaks and openly track commitments made in the course of planning. In response to a series of devastating gas explosions, we put stricter protocols in place for gas related work. We also made sure that commercial tenants have the opportunity to seek legal recourse if they are harassed by their landlords.

To achieve greater access and transparency, we charged ahead with a multiplatform approach for bringing more people into the government decision-making process. In the last year, we applied user-friendly design in work that included the creation of a tool to explore the City’s budget, and made proactive outreach to ethnic and community media the standard at the Council.

This annual report highlights much more of the work and accomplishments that would not be possible without partnerships with leaders across sectors, community-based organizations and advocates. I am confident that all of these efforts will have a lasting impact on the lives of so many people, as well as on this institution that is entrusted to serve them.

The times ahead will test our mettle as New Yorkers, but I truly believe that together we will not simply stay the course but rise to protect and enhance what we have struggled for and remain bold in our vision of a city that brings all residents to the table.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Melissa Mark-Viverito".

Melissa Mark-Viverito  
Speaker of the New York City Council





## About the Council

There are 51 Council districts in our city and each is represented by a Council Member. Together, under the leadership of Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, we form the New York City Council—the largest municipal legislative body in the nation.

We write and pass laws that relate to nearly every aspect of city life. We also perform a robust oversight function, holding hundreds of hearings each year to evaluate agency performance and examine pressing issues affecting New Yorkers.

Creating laws and serving as an oversight body are two of our chief responsibilities. We also negotiate and pass the nation's largest municipal budget. Through this process, we work diligently to ensure that public funds are used equitably and reach each one of our neighborhoods.

The growth and development of our city is key to New York's success. This is why we also make decisions on the way land is used throughout the boroughs.

We also focus on the needs of our local constituents. We are on the ground each and every day in our districts. We respond to the individual concerns and needs of residents and to issues affecting our local communities. From Port Richmond to Sheepshead Bay and from Laurelton to Washington Heights and Soundview, we advocate for our constituents and work with them to solve problems.



## Ensuring Accessibility & Inclusion

**The Speaker and Council are committed to making meaningful inclusion the standard by advancing the way we integrate technology, engaging the local media that diverse New Yorkers rely on, and expanding accommodations for people with special needs.**

In 2016, we celebrated major milestones outlined in Council 2.0 – our technology roadmap for inclusion and open government. We placed interactive, accessible web design at the center of major processes and initiatives. This work included producing an interactive tool for exploring the City’s budget; creating a site and model to support the transparency of community planning; distilling complex zoning material to make it easier to understand; and implementing a responsive, multiplatform campaign for engaging diverse teens in the Young Women’s Initiative. In August, we held our 2nd Digital Inclusion Summit at Civic Hall, where we convened policymakers, community organizations, and technologists to discuss participatory civic processes. The Council also continued to expand the scope of our texting program, incorporating idea collection during the Fall 2016 portion of Participatory Budgeting.

Because 4.1 million New Yorkers turn to ethnic, neighborhood, youth and other community media, the Council is committed to making sure that these media have equal access to government information. To this end, the Speaker and Mayor announced in early 2016 the creation and availability of the City’s first directory of community media for communications staff at the Council and city agencies. We’ve continued to engage diverse media by hosting roundtables with local media, increasing cultural competency and advocating for proportional ad dollars and prioritizing translation of key information. The Speaker put in place a staff person who is dedicated to guiding and supporting this work as a standard at the Council.

Last spring, our Technology Committee held the Council's first paperless hearing, in which Microsoft Surface tablets and QR codes were used for accessing documents. We moved a step forward in October, when we integrated these tablets into our Stated Meeting and into a Sanitation Committee hearing to test how this technology can help Members view or easily search documents, reduce the use of paper and the preparation time involved with copying and distribution, and modernize the way the Council conducts its business. Our paperless Stated Meeting saved more than 24,000 sheets of paper and laid the groundwork for exploring how we can modernize Council processes going forward.

The Council recognizes that people with disabilities may have difficulty accessing the Internet. While some software may alleviate this burden, the effectiveness of this assistive technology depends on whether a web site is properly designed. To facilitate better access, the Council passed legislation requiring the adoption of a standard for accessibility for city web sites.





## Safeguarding Neighborhoods

**Our neighborhoods are the cornerstones of our city. We've listened to your feedback in community-driven planning, passed laws to ensure buildings are safe and moved to protect commercial tenants from unscrupulous practices.**

Ground-up planning produces better outcomes, as was the case in East Harlem and East New York. With the support of the Speaker, who represents District 8, East Harlem residents came together prior to the City's application for a neighborhood rezoning. We also applied a holistic approach to planning in East New York. As a result, we supported a plan that balances a clear affordable housing and schools strategy, open space, and economic development.

In March of 2016, we adopted two historic proposals – Zoning for Quality and Affordability and Mandatory Inclusionary Housing. To meet diverse needs, we made significant changes to both proposals based on feedback from communities and organizations across the City.

A series of gas explosions in our city left New Yorkers without homes and resulted in the loss of lives. In response, the Council passed a legislative package requiring more frequent and stringent inspections of gas systems, stricter protocols for those working on gas piping, and better communication between building owners, gas companies, the City, and the public.

Coordination and communication among city agencies in partnership with a community is critical for successfully addressing quality-of-life issues. Last year, the Council passed a law creating neighborhood support teams for sustaining this type of approach. This measure was grounded in the Speaker's convening of several agencies to collaboratively develop a thoughtful strategy to resolve quality-of-life issues on East 125th Street.

We understand that in the wake of disasters like Hurricane Sandy, residential buildings may be in violation of city codes because of circumstances beyond the building owner's control. This is why the Council passed a package of bills preventing building owners from being held liable for civil or criminal penalties for violations received in the immediate aftermath of a disaster or while enrolled in a disaster recovery program or for violations for work done through a city-controlled recovery program.

Rapidly rising commercial rents can encourage unscrupulous landlords to harass tenants who pay lower rents than what a new tenant might be willing to pay. To address this harassment, the Council passed a law creating a private right of action so that commercial tenants have the opportunity to seek legal recourse when harassed by their landlords.

The Council has set a goal to decrease citywide greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent by 2050. In an effort to move toward that goal, we passed legislation that will gradually increase the amount of biodiesel required in building heating oil from 2 percent to 20 percent. Biodiesel emits 50 percent to 90 percent less greenhouse gases than oil.

In 2016, the Council updated and strengthened the City's green building laws to require new city-owned buildings to meet tougher energy standards and to extend the 2009 Greener, Greater Buildings Plan to more than 10,000 additional buildings.

Last year, we also secured an additional \$100 million investment for Hudson River Park as a part of the development of the St. John's Terminal Building on West Houston and West Street. This \$100 million will be used to make urgently needed investments to the park and ensure that it continues to serve as an open space resource for millions of New Yorkers and visitors alike.

Through our Land Use and Finance Committees, the Council has supported the preservation and development of tens of thousands of affordable housing units. We've also protected historic neighborhoods by landmarking dozens of buildings across the City.

Bicycling is one of the most environmentally friendly and healthy forms of transportation. To encourage more New Yorkers to ride their bikes, we passed legislation expanding bicycle access in buildings.





## Defending Workers

**Support for, and protection of, diverse workers, along with providing access for job-generating small businesses, are critical for local growth. We've taken steps over the last year that are advancing the interests of workers and the countless people who depend on them.**

In 2016, the Council passed legislation requiring 90-day retention periods for grocery store, food service, and building service employees when their business or building is sold to a new owner. This allows new owners time to fairly evaluate workers' performance and keep them on if satisfied.

Last April, the Council passed legislation reforming the for-hire vehicle (FHV) industry to benefit both customers and the hard-working drivers who serve them. The legislation requires car companies to provide accurate fare quotes ahead of time at a customer's request and to protect any passenger data that is collected; creates a universal FHV driver's license; abolishes the English proficiency exam for FHV licenses; increases penalties for illegal street hails; and allows black cars that pass inspections to stay in service longer.

In a city where people of color are the majority, achieving economic justice and reducing income inequality means helping more minority- and women-owned business enterprises (M/WBE) to get off the ground and increasing their share of contracts with the City. That's why the Council established an M/WBE Advisory Board

and created or amended a range of reporting requirements to provide more transparency around the City's contracts with M/WBEs.

First announced by Speaker Mark-Viverito in her 2016 State of the City Address, the Council enacted legislation that will create a Division of Paid Care within the NYC Office of Labor Standards. The Council also passed legislation requiring the NYC Department for the Aging (DFTA) to develop and conduct a survey of unpaid caregivers and service providers to assess existing services and to identify their needs. Using this information, DFTA will develop a comprehensive action plan. Finally, in one of the first laws passed in 2016, the Council prohibited employment discrimination based on someone's actual or perceived status as a caregiver.

In December 2016, the Council passed the Freelance Isn't Free Act, the first law in the nation establishing protections specifically for freelance workers, including requiring written contracts, enhancing the legal remedies available to freelance workers, and establishing new penalties for stiffing these independent workers.

The Council also funded the New Immigrant Community Empowerment's New York City Day Laborer Workforce Initiative (DLWI). This \$500,000 initiative supports the development of existing day laborer centers in the City and expansion of centers into all the boroughs. The DLWI coalition consists of numerous non-profit organizations and, as of June 2016, the Centers had assisted 1,800 day laborers with filing wage theft, skills building and job referrals, among other help.



## Investing in Women & Girls

**All girls and young women must have a fair chance to succeed, and our city must be proactive when it comes to ensuring their success, well-being and safety. That's why the Speaker and Council have developed and invested in new policies and initiatives over the past year aimed at producing better outcomes for them and, in turn, our entire city.**

Our commitment to gender equity must be reflected in our government structures. In 2016, the Council passed legislation to make the Mayor's Commission on Gender Equity a permanent part of the Administration. The Council's bill calls for the Commission to study the nature and extent of inequities facing women and girls in the City, as well as the impact of these inequities on their economic, civic, and social well-being. The bill also requires that the Commission submit an annual report to the Mayor and Speaker on its activities for the previous year, goals for the following year, and recommendations for the reduction of gender-based inequality.

All young women have the right to feel safe and must have access to opportunities and services that will help them succeed. Speaker Mark-Viverito launched the Young Women's Initiative (YWI) to convene young women, service providers, and city agencies in producing recommendations to address the unmet needs of young women of color, ages 12 to 24. Last year, YWI released a report with over 100 recommendations and



the Council committed \$10 million over two years for implementation. Our financial commitment was matched by philanthropic partners and this model is being replicated in other parts of the country.

Mothers who are breastfeeding also have a right to express milk in a clean and convenient environment. That is why we passed legislation to provide additional lactation rooms in the City and to require the availability of these rooms at job centers, SNAP centers, health centers, and medical assistance program centers. The City is also required to create a list of all public spaces with lactation rooms and to make this list available at [nyc.gov](http://nyc.gov).

While New York's violent crimes rate has steadily fallen, domestic violence has remained stubbornly high. As a means of identifying better solutions, the Council passed legislation requiring improved data reporting related to domestic violence, including domestic violence committed on New York City Housing Authority properties.

In legislation that drew national attention, the Council passed a bill requiring that feminine hygiene products be provided free of charge in public schools, homeless shelters, and NYC Department of Correction facilities. We also successfully petitioned the State to exempt feminine hygiene products from state and local sales taxes.



This Council is committed to revitalizing the City's Human Rights Law and Human Rights Commission (HRC). In 2016, the Council expanded the Human Rights Law, allowed HRC to award attorneys' fees in complaints brought before it, banned housing discrimination against survivors of domestic violence, and expanded the prohibition against discrimination in public accommodations, among other steps, to make New York a more fair place to live.

New York City's senior population is the fastest growing demographic, yet the NYC Department for the Aging's (DFTA) budget continues to be inadequate. Many seniors rely on services provided through DFTA's network, especially those who live on fixed- or low-incomes. The Council continued to show its commitment to providing quality services for seniors in Fiscal 2017 by allocating \$21.4 million toward senior services initiatives. This not only funds innovative services for niche senior populations, including Holocaust survivors and LGBTQ seniors, but also continues to provide critical support for DFTA's core operations. The Council also successfully negotiated with the Administration to baseline an additional \$1.8 million to address the case management waitlist, as well as to have the Administration fully fund all DFTA senior center space costs needs, provide congregate meals for seniors, and commit additional resources to address the homecare waitlist.

Federal cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which reduced monthly benefits on average by \$18, have created a strain on emergency food pantries across the City. Pantries have been inundated with hungry New Yorkers in need of food once their monthly SNAP benefits have run out. The Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) provides a year-round supply of shelf-stable food for approximately 500 food pantries and soup kitchens throughout our city. To meet the increased demand on food pantries, the Council negotiated with the Administration to add an additional \$4.9 million to the EFAP budget, which increased the City's food procurement capacity by 40 percent.

New York's most vulnerable residents are often targeted by con artists and unscrupulous actors. That's why the Council passed legislation requiring the NYC Department of Consumer Affairs to provide specialized outreach and education to seniors, women, and immigrants on consumer protection issues. With 60 percent of pending immigration legal cases deemed 'complex' and with limited sources of funding, legal service providers are restricted and prevented from providing flexible and appropriate services to immigrant New Yorkers. To address this need, we committed to serving an additional 1,000 complex cases at a total cost of \$2.7 million, increasing the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative capacity from 4,000 to 5,000 cases, including about 1,800 complex cases.

The Council successfully advocated to provide \$1 million in support of legal services for unaccompanied minors who arrive in New York City. Despite the fact that many of these children have legitimate claims to relief, these young people are likely to be sent back to their home countries without legal representation.





## Reforming Criminal Justice & Corrections

**A legacy of institutional racism has tainted our criminal justice system and disproportionately affected generations of African-American and Latino families. The Council is committed to enacting laws that will introduce and reinforce smart, fair and humane alternatives to criminalization.**

Report after report has shown that Rikers Island is broken. In 2016, the Speaker and Council initiated the Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform. Led by former New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, this Commission is rethinking the use of city jails and the land on Rikers Island, examining how to significantly reduce the pre-trial incarceration population at Rikers, and exploring the possibility of housing pre-trial detainees in community-based facilities.

The NYC Department of Correction (DOC) began housing pre-trial detainees in departmental uniforms in 2015, but did not establish systems sufficient to ensure that inmates could appear in civilian clothing at legal proceedings, leaving them at risk of prejudice and compromising the integrity of the judicial process. These individuals were also often released from courthouse facilities in DOC uniforms. In response, the Council passed a law that requires the DOC to produce and release these inmates in civilian clothing. This bill was coupled with a measure that requires the DOC to produce inmates who have multiple open criminal cases for all criminal court appearances, avoiding thousands of unnecessary warrants from being issued every year.

The United States Department of Justice found a "culture of violence" in our city's correction facilities, and a federal monitor is now overseeing numerous systemic changes to them. This monitor, however, is only temporary, so the Council established an Inspector General for the DOC to ensure strong and permanent oversight over the DOC.

The NYPD issues almost 400,000 criminal summonses each year for low-level, quality-of-life offenses. These carry the possibility of a permanent criminal record for minor offenses and generate over 1.5 million active warrants for failure to appear in court. The Criminal Justice Reform Act (CJRA), passed by the Council in May, creates a more proportional, just system of enforcing low-level, non-violent offenses by diverting many such offenses to civil court instead of criminal court. The CJRA is projected to divert over 100,000 cases from criminal court, save close to 10,000 people from having a permanent criminal record, and avoid the issuance of over 50,000 warrants each year.

As part of the Fiscal 2017 Preliminary Budget response, the Council urged the Administration to fully fund the budget needs of the City's five district attorneys. As a result, the district attorneys received a collective increase of \$21.8 million that will support several new initiatives and adequately fund core work, including the creation of an Alternatives to Incarceration Unit and resources to reduce gun-related and other violent crimes. The increase in funding will allow the district attorneys to ensure that our laws are being enforced efficiently and fairly with swift and effective methods.

The Council passed a number of laws to safeguard inmates in the City's jail system, including requiring the DOC to evaluate the programs it uses, report on incidences of violence, mentally ill inmates and recidivism, and provide trauma-informed care to persons who are incarcerated.

In 2016, the Council allocated \$600,000 for expanding a video visitation program with the City's three library systems to provide free live video services for families who wish to visit with their incarcerated loved ones. This program will not only decrease the burden on families in our city, but may also help reduce recidivism. This video visitation is offered at 22 public library branches across all the boroughs.

The DOC runs a nursery program on Rikers Island for recent mothers to be housed with their newborn children, a program that has historically been underused. The Council passed a bill establishing formal procedures for admission into the nursery, including establishing an appeals process, as well as requiring comprehensive reporting related to the use of the nursery, to ensure that incarcerated mothers entitled to care for their newborn children are not impermissibly denied entry.



## Strengthening Civic Engagement

**Democratic participation should be encouraged. The Speaker and Council have advocated for reducing barriers, followed up on complaints at poll sites, and taken steps to link voters to more information and to support young people in civic participation.**

In advance of the 2016 election, the Council passed legislation to improve communication between the NYC Board of Elections and voters, including mandating more thorough online resources. The Council also called on the State to allow early voting, establish same-day and online registration, and establish no-excuse absentee voting.

In response to reports of inappropriately purged voter rolls, inaccurate party affiliation listings, late poll openings, and malfunctioning voting machines in the April 2016 presidential primaries, Council staff observed election operations at poll sites across the City for the June congressional primaries and November general election.

Last spring, the Council participated in the second annual Student Voter Registration Day, registering more than 8,500 student voters in 61 high schools across the City. This effort quadrupled the number of students registered compared to the first year of the program and more than doubled the number of participating schools.



The Council is committed to helping young people organize their peers. We supported civic education in action through Generation Citizen, a non-profit group that recruits college students from CUNY campuses, trains and supports them, and places them in designated partner high schools. There, they work with teachers to provide workshops twice a week over eight to ten weeks, ultimately leading to a student-selected project focused on a specific issue.



## Increasing Transparency, Accountability and Efficiency

**From studying the effectiveness of tax breaks and tracking community benefits agreements, to requiring more data for improving services and increasing our city's rainy day funds, we've taken aggressive steps to make sure government better serves New Yorkers.**

When the City or a private developer seeks a zoning change, they often commit to building new schools or infrastructure, mitigating environmental impacts, or taking other steps to improve the surrounding neighborhood. But these promises are too often left unfulfilled, forgotten or ignored. That's why the Council passed legislation requiring the City to establish and maintain a publicly accessible, searchable list of written commitments made in connection with most land use applications, including for rezonings.

New York City provides over \$2.8 billion in annual economic development tax breaks to stimulate job creation, encourage investment in commercial real estate, and promote investment in equipment and training. In spite of this spending, there has been no regular review of how effective these tax breaks really are. That's why in 2016, a Council-led task force released a report outlining how the City can introduce a standardized process to evaluate how successful these tax breaks are in achieving their intended goals. The Council has taken steps to implement this process.

Demographic data is essential to the thoughtful development and evaluation of policies, especially for problems that affect specific groups and need targeted solutions. Yet we have very little demographic data regarding Asian Pacific Americans and individuals who identify as multiracial (two of the fastest growing demographic

groups in New York City) and for the LGBTQ community. To correct this deficiency, the Council passed legislation requiring all city agencies that collect demographic data from the people they serve to also begin doing so for Asian Pacific Americans, multiracial New Yorkers, and LGBTQ persons.

The experiences young people gain through the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) help increase their school attendance and decrease incarceration and mortality rates among them. To further champion this program, the Council successfully advocated for expanding SYEP to support 60,000 teenagers. We also initiated and partnered with the Administration to convene a Youth Employment Task Force. With members from city agencies, philanthropic organizations, and research and advocacy communities, the Task Force will publish a report with both programmatic and budgetary recommendations to improve the City's youth jobs programs.

When the economy hits a rough spot, city services become a lifeline for many New Yorkers. Often, however, the City's revenues take a hit at the same time, making it harder to fund those urgently needed services. Recognizing this, the City puts money aside in good years to help maintain services in bad times. Through the efforts of the Council, \$500 million was added to the Retiree Health Benefit Trust Fund at the start of Fiscal 2017. This brought total reserves to \$9.4 billion, or about 11 percent of the adjusted operating budget.