



# **Effective Solutions to Immediately Address the Ongoing Humanitarian and Political Crises of Homelessness, Substance Use, and Public Safety**

## *2025 State Legislative Platform*

The intersecting issues of homelessness, the overdose crisis, and unmet mental health needs continue to impact an ever-growing number of New Yorkers, causing a humanitarian crisis across New York State. Our lawmakers continue to lean on rhetoric and policies of criminalization and incarceration, promoting jails and prisons as a public safety intervention, instead of addressing the root causes of these issues through measurable funding and evidence-based policy. This has exacerbated a political crisis in which the Right, and some Democrats, have exploited and scapegoated these issues for the purpose of winning elections and pushing even more regressive policies, which has dissolved the public trust in government. Not only is this strategy ineffective and costly, but it continues to have a negative and generational impact on overall community health and well-being. These social issues are solvable, and our elected leaders must have the courage and political will to comprehensively address them – especially in a Trump presidency.

### **New York State's Humanitarian Crisis:**

[188,000 people a year](#) in our state come back to our communities from prisons and jails, fundamentally destabilized, stigmatized, and uniquely vulnerable. People leaving jails and prisons are at least [129 times more likely](#) to die from a drug overdose the two weeks following their release. And, formerly incarcerated people are [10 times more](#) likely to experience homelessness than the general population. Little is done to ensure people have what they need to thrive upon their return. Instead, tremendous barriers to basic needs have been erected, keeping scarce opportunities for employment, healthcare, and housing out of reach for many.

Since 2020, [over 20,000](#) New Yorkers have died from a *preventable* overdose - 19 New Yorkers everyday - which is likely undercounted because of significant lags and [underfunding and staffing](#) in overdose data. Marginalized communities – low-income, older New Yorkers and Black and Brown communities have disproportionately higher rates of overdose. And, overdose remains the leading cause of death for homeless New Yorkers. No corner or community has been spared to this crisis. And, our state lacks a measurable plan with a sustainable infrastructure to address it.

On any given night in 2024, [158,010 people](#) across our state are experiencing homelessness. In July 2024, [130,438 people slept](#) in NYC shelters each night. There is no mechanism to accurately estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness who reside on the streets or in public spaces or people living doubled up or tripled up with family members or friends. Rising evictions, voucher discrimination, real estate greed, and lawmakers scapegoating new arrivals for political gain have deepened the homelessness crisis.

## **Rapidly Scale-up and Fund a Sustainable Caring Infrastructure & Safe, Accessible Housing**

### **Daniel's Law to Create Non-Police Response to Mental Health Crisis (Brouk/Bronson)**

**S2398/A2210:** Named after a Black man in Rochester who was killed by police while experiencing a mental health crisis, Daniel's Law would remove police officers as first responders to people experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis, and allow social workers, mental health counselors, peers and other health workers to respond instead.

**Overdose Prevention and Recovery Act (Fernandez/Gonzalez-Rojas) S55/A69:** Makes the Opioid Stewardship Fund a permanent revenue stream – that cannot be supplanted – with a percentage dedicated to recovery services and supports, and to the Department of Health to fund the harm reduction infrastructure; syringe service programs, drug user health hubs, and drug checking services.

**Drug Checking Services (Fernandez/Kelles) S56:** Drug checking provides information within the context of an unstable supply to inform people to make positive behavior choices on how to consume their substances – which can save lives. This bill provides immunity to all parties involved in drug-checking infrastructure.

**Executive Action – Authorize Overdose Prevention Centers (OPCs):** Governor Hochul has power to authorize OPCs through declaring a disaster, or directing the DOH Commissioner to declare a public health emergency – this authority was used in 1992 to successfully establish syringe exchange programs in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

**Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) (Kavanagh/Rosenthal) S72/A4021A:** Establishes a state-funded rental assistance program for New Yorkers who are currently homeless or are at risk of homelessness. When implemented with sustainable funding, it would ensure those with extremely low incomes, undocumented New Yorkers, and people with certain felony convictions have access to this statewide rental assistance program.

**HIV Housing for NY (Hoylman-Sigal/Bronson) S442/A2418:** Expands access to the existing 30% rent cap protections available solely to recipients of the NYC HIV/AIDS Service Administration (HASA) to all New Yorkers across the state living with HIV/AIDS. The legislation mandates the state to fund localities to implement the program alongside existing public assistance benefits, allowing us to end homelessness among New Yorkers with HIV.

**#Wifi4Homeless (Gonzalez/Reyes) S4561A/A5649A:** Homeless New Yorkers residing in temporary housing lack basic internet access, barring the ability to search and apply for permanent housing, jobs, participate in remote schooling, apply for government benefits, obtain necessary medical care, and more. The bill creates reliable internet access for people residing in temporary housing and ensures the expenses incurred by the local social services districts.

**Expanding and Improving Supportive Housing:** Supportive Housing is a critical intervention for tackling the intersecting issues of homelessness, substance use, and unmet mental health needs. Through the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative, New York State has built much-needed emergency and long-term supportive housing across the state. However, existing and future supportive housing units must include mechanisms for provider accountability by supportive housing tenants, quality onsite services, and dignified living conditions.

### **Decarcerate and Create Pathways to Stability Upon Release:**

**Challenging Wrongful Convictions:** Creates a legitimate pathway to exoneration for people who were wrongfully convicted and have new evidence, not previously available to them during their criminal case. The bill will provide for the assignment of counsel, the right to an appeal, the right to a hearing and the right to review evidence. It will also allow more people who plead guilty to seek relief on actual innocence grounds and remove additional procedural barriers to relief.

**Elder Parole (Hoylman-Sigal/Davila) S454:** Elder Parole allows for the consideration of parole release for people aged 55 and older who have served at least 15 consecutive years in prison. Older people, especially those who have been convicted of the most serious crimes, have the lowest recidivism rates of any age cohort, posing little, if any risk to public safety.

**Fair and Timely Parole (Salazar/Weprin) S159 / A127:** Ensures that the parole release process is based on who people are today and their many accomplishments in prison, not their crime of conviction.

**Executive Action - Medicaid Enrollment Before Re-Entry:** Governor Hochul must direct the Department of Health to submit a revised waiver to Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to reactivate their original application which will ensure Medicaid coverage is turned on 90 days pre-release. [Eleven states, red and blue](#), have been authorized to expand this lifesaving healthcare coverage.

**Gate Money (Parker/Gibbs) S6643/A9115:** Provides for eligible incarcerated individuals to receive a monthly stipend upon release from a state correctional facility.

### **Create a Strong Economy & Public Transportation Infrastructure :**

**Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Act (Gounardes/McMahon) S1981A/A4120A:** Amends Highway Law to support alternative means of transportation, like more accessible public transportation – which is critical for the health and wellbeing of marginalized communities – and require a Vehicle Miles Traveled assessment before highway projects, as well as creating a clean energy goal and an Assessment Working Group.