

# TOGETHER, INVINCIBLE:

## A Bold Agenda for Young New Yorkers in 2023

As we continue to recover from the global pandemic and exacerbation of systemic barriers, the challenges young adults face, including tuition and non-tuition-related costs, unemployment, health care affordability, and rent prices have risen exponentially. Despite New York's increasing vaccination rate, the long-term impacts of the pandemic and economic turmoil are a sign that we must act now to advance more equitable policy initiatives for current and future New Yorkers.

The following recommendations are aimed at expanding overall economic security and access for today's young adults; improving the affordability and accessibility of higher education, and strengthening economic security and basic needs resources. We aim to ensure that all young adults have access to comprehensive affordable health care, vaccines, and boosters. Our policy priorities for 2023 are a multi-pronged approach to promote solutions that increase the long-term health, financial stability, and opportunity for all young New Yorkers.

These priorities were chosen by centering young adult input from our Young Advocates Program, Youth Advisory Board, coalitions, and partners, with Young Invincible's mission and values in mind.

### Higher Education

#### ***1. Address Student Basic Needs on NY's College Campuses: Food Security, Housing Security, and Mental Health***

##### **Increase Access to Campus Food and SNAP Benefits Pass the Hunger-Free Campus Act, S1151B/A6881**

This \$20 million competitive grant program provides funding for colleges and universities to build the campus infrastructure to better meet student needs. In order for campuses to participate they must establish a hunger task force, designate a staff member to support Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment, and increase campus usage options for SNAP. In addition, it requires that



Key: \* = No related legislation proposed yet. \*\* = Forthcoming legislation in the pipeline (as of 12/08/22)



campuses establish food pantries and a meal credit sharing program or expansion of vouchers to better meet student needs. It also requires that campuses perform outreach and conduct student surveys.

**Invest \$2 million in Transforming Food Pantries into Resource Hubs \***

In 2018, Governor Andrew Cuomo launched an initiative to create food pantries on all public college campuses in New York — but the program has not been funded since. New York must re-invest in this program to ensure campus food pantries are fully stocked and staffed, and able to connect students to other resources. In addition, pantries must be transformed into centers where students can be assessed for eligibility in food and essential needs resource programs.

**Provide Targeted and Effective SNAP Enrollment Education and Outreach \***

Invest in public institutions to launch a campaign targeted to college students to support student SNAP enrollment. This would help erase the stigma of hunger and increase awareness of campus food resources. Professional development for faculty and staff will be included in the rollout of this campaign so that they can also inform students of resources and support. Students should have an active role in designing and implementing this campaign and at least 40 percent of funding should go to paying students to act as educators and advocates for SNAP enrollment.

***Support Students Experiencing Homelessness***

**Create On-Campus Liaisons Who Support Students Experiencing Homelessness\*\***

Nearly 15 percent of New York’s public college students experienced homelessness even before Covid. As more New Yorkers are on the brink of losing their housing, students need campus-level support to help navigate the financial aid process and campus resources, while collecting critical information about the number of students experiencing homelessness on campus. States like California, Maine, and Tennessee have all passed legislation creating liaisons to help unhoused college students. New York should follow suit and create liaisons at CUNY and SUNY. [\(See our related Report for more information and recommendations for addressing youth homelessness\)](#)

**Increase City and State Funding And Accessibility for the NCS Scholars Pilot Program\***

This program, run by the Neighborhood Coalition for Shelter (NCS), builds on a state-funded model used for homeless students in California. It helps students leave—or avoid the trauma of entering — the homeless shelter system and makes it more likely they will earn a degree that nearly doubles their earning capacity. The program is funded by \$1 million in private donations, which help cover rent at a Queens apartment building for 16 CUNY students currently, with capacity

for up to 36. The program includes a social worker on staff, on-site access to mental and physical health resources, connections to social services, academic and employment support, and mentoring. Overall, it costs less than \$30,000 per student per year, compared to \$50,370, the average annual cost of housing one adult in the homeless shelter system. Strategically scaling the program to other CUNY schools with the most housing-insecure students will increase graduation rates, government savings, and economic returns.

### **Create a System-Level Essential Needs Advisory Board at CUNY and SUNY \***

The advisory boards will work to identify and remove barriers to accessing essential needs as well as develop systems solutions. This also includes identifying the administrative obstacles that institutions face in implementing benefits programs such as SNAP enrollment. It will also help better inform students on resources taking the virtual nature of schooling into consideration.

### **Require Data Collection and Reporting on Students' Access to Resources \***

Require CUNY and SUNY to develop a mechanism for measuring essential needs' impact on students. In order for this to materialize, data and outreach partnerships with local government organizations, such as NYC's Human Resource Administration (HRA). In addition to data-sharing agreements, these organizations would also help educate students on benefits and help them enroll. Any such system should be designed to protect student confidentiality.

## ***Increase Access to Campus Mental Health Supports***

### **Invest in Campus Mental Health Counseling**

Covid has had a serious impact on college students' mental health, with nearly half of CUNY students reporting an increased need for mental health services. To support students' and their ability to persist in college, state lawmakers must increase their investment in mental health counseling on public college campuses, at CUNY and SUNY schools, and guarantee at least one counselor for every 1,000 students — with a priority for hiring more BIPOC counselors. These additional counselors can help sustain virtual mental health services during the pandemic.

## ***2. Support New York's COVID-19 Recovery by Making College More Accessible and Affordable***

### **Invest in New York's Opportunity Programs \***

New York's Opportunity Programs are a lifeline for low-income college students and students of color, providing financial aid, support with non-tuition costs like textbooks, and academic support for eligible students. New York will need a strong, educated workforce to recover from Covid, and opportunity programs are key to ensuring that Black, brown, and low-income students are supported through the recovery and beyond.



### **Expand Dual-Enrollment Opportunities to Improve College Success & Attainment\***

Dual enrollment courses allow students to receive college credit while in high school. Participating students need fewer credits/funds to graduate from college. While CUNY's College Now program provides a fantastic institutional pipeline for these partnerships, the program is limited and should be made accessible to all who qualify. Additionally, more College Now-like programs are needed throughout SUNY, along with more New York AP and IB courses, and equitable rates of advertisement and enrollment for BIPOC, low-income, and first-generation students.

### **Pass the New Deal for CUNY (A5843/S4461)**

Our state has disinvested in CUNY for decades, pushing costs onto students while cutting critical services. The time is now to invest in CUNY and make it a driver of an equitable Covid recovery for New York. State lawmakers should sponsor the New Deal for CUNY legislation, which provides students with free tuition, increased mental health and academic counseling, more full-time faculty, and desperately needed investments in campus buildings.

### **Expand the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) to Cover Additional Semesters (S5692/A7323 and S6874)**

TAP is New York's biggest financial aid program — but only supports students through a maximum of eight semesters of college. In comparison, the federal Pell Grant provides up to 12 semesters of financial aid support. As students navigate the uncertainty of Covid, New York should expand the number of semesters available to students to make sure that they have the financial support they need to earn their degree, especially as the pandemic disrupts students' academic progress. S5692/A7323 expands TAP to six years aligning with the federal Pell grant and S6874 expands TAP to five years.

### **Increase TAP for Students Experiencing Homelessness (A8520/S6873)**

Homeless students in New York are classified as independent when it comes to TAP. As such, they are eligible for less state financial aid than their stably housed peers, who are classified as dependent students. Today, the maximum independent TAP award is \$3,025, compared with the maximum dependent TAP award, which is \$5,165.

### **Encourage College Enrollment by Requiring FAFSA Completion for All NYS High School Students (A361/S5409)**

During the Covid pandemic, fewer New York students and families are completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) — including low-income students and students of color. New York should join states like Louisiana, Illinois, and Texas and require high-school seniors to either complete the FAFSA or opt-out via a signed waiver. As more New York students experience homelessness, it

is particularly important to make sure guidance counselors and homeless liaisons in the K-12 system are connecting with unaccompanied homeless youth and are making sure these students are completing the FAFSA.



### ***3. Build Equitable Pathways to College Completion***

#### **Adopt an Equity-Driven Postsecondary Attainment Goal & Implementation Plan<sup>1\*</sup>**

Committing to an attainment goal of 60 percent of New Yorkers, among all races and ethnicities, by 2030 would mean that 6.5 million residents would hold a postsecondary degree or credential by 2030 — representing a 484,000 increase in postsecondary attainment over current projections. However, that increase may be disproportionately white and middle-class. A more targeted set of attainment goals would require leaders at all levels to focus on the postsecondary needs of students who are too often underserved by the education system, especially setting specific differentiated and ambitious goals for students identifying as low-income, Black, brown, or first-generation. Setting strategic equity-driven attainment goals would create clear and explicit targets for attainment and persistence across the state, higher education sectors, and regions.

#### **Use Data to Support Better Outcomes for Students \***

The state should establish statewide early childhood-to-workforce data connections that include college persistence and completion, wage and employment data, and data on whether students make it “to and through” college from each high school. This data can help identify and address equity gaps in the educational pipeline, assess how the pandemic is impacting the education-to-workforce transition, and support policymakers and institutions in prioritizing

<sup>1</sup> 2022 New York State of the State, p. 185 [governor.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/2022StateoftheStateBook.pdf](https://governor.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/2022StateoftheStateBook.pdf)

policies, programs, and services that will be most supportive for students.

**Pass the Fair College Admissions Act (A9505/S8498 & A8470/S8506)**

Gauranteeing seats for students based on legacy admissions is unfair and reduces the number of available acceptances for students based on merit. This also tends to be discriminatory and inequitable, as, historically, legacy admissions practices and early action have disproportionately advantaged white and wealthy students while disenfranchising first-generation, low-income, and BIPOC students. In fact, the data shows virtually no elite college legacy students are low-income. This bill would prohibit legacy and early admissions policies at New York colleges and universities, ensuring that admissions decisions are made based on merit and equity, not exclusionary norms.

## Health Care

### ***1. Expand Comprehensive Health Care Access to All New Yorkers, Regardless of Immigration Status***

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**Create Emergency COVID-19 Essential Plan for Immigrant New Yorkers (A1585/S2549)**

Immigrant New Yorkers have been at the frontlines of the Covid pandemic, risking exposure to keep New York running. Yet, as many as 400,000 undocumented New Yorkers are prevented from accessing healthcare coverage in New York. As the Covid pandemic continues, New York must ensure all New Yorkers, regardless of their immigration status, can access Covid treatment. New York should create a temporary state-funded Essential Plan for New Yorkers up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level who have had Covid, and are currently excluded from coverage because of their immigration status.

**Pass the New York Health Act (A.6058/S.5474)**

The Affordable Care Act helped expand health coverage to millions of New Yorkers. Yet, we know uninsured rates are much higher in BIPOC communities, and hundreds of thousands are blocked from accessing care due to their immigration status. The New York Health Act would eliminate New York’s coverage gaps and affordability burdens, and provide comprehensive health coverage for all New Yorkers.

### ***2. End Medical Debt for all New Yorkers***

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**Pass the Patient Medical Debt Protection Act (A.3470-A/S.2521-A)**

Ballooning medical debt contributes to the instability New Yorkers are facing, harming both those with health insurance and those without. New York State can address the real financial impact of healthcare costs by passing the Patient Medical Debt Protection Act which ends unfair medical billing practices such as

requiring consolidated, clear hospital bills and capping interest on medical debt to 3 percent. It would also protect consumers from surprise out-of-network bills caused by provider or plan misinformation and protect patients from unfair facility fees.



### ***3. Expand Reproductive Care for all seeking it in New York***

#### **Pass the Reproductive Freedom and Equity Program (A10148A/S9078)**

New York serves as a sanctuary state for those seeking reproductive care and abortions across the country. Yet, even before Roe was overturned, our state’s abortion care providers were overburdened, underfunded, and struggling to increase accessibility. As the Supreme Court and other states continue to attack their own precedent of women having bodily autonomy, it is more important than ever that we expand our state’s capacity to equitably serve those seeking reproductive care, especially young adults. This program ensures greater access to abortion care in a number of major ways, including providing funding to abortion providers and non-profit organizations that facilitate access, as well as covering related expenses that would otherwise prevent low-income individuals from accessing this care, such as travel, lodging, and child care.

#### **Enable all SUNY campuses to offer abortion medication (related to bill A3322/S9444a)**

This legislation helps ensure that a majority of New York public colleges and universities make the most essential, basic, and cheap form of reproductive care accessible to all students. This is especially crucial at rural and suburban campuses, where community abortion clinics may not exist. These services should be available to all. However, acknowledging the challenges and major costs of implementing this across 64 SUNY campuses, each with its own strengths and needs, we believe this program would be best introduced as a pilot and scaled over 3-5 years.

## ***4. Expand Strategic Public Health Outreach & Reporting***

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### **Targeted Covid and Flu Outreach and Education to Young Adults \***

Young adults across the nation and throughout New York have expressed their skepticism and distrust of the government, medical system, and vaccines. Hundreds of thousands of young New Yorkers lack accurate information on vaccines and the bivalent booster. To combat Covid and flu misinformation, distrust, and information gaps, it is crucial that New York fund public health information campaigns targeted toward young people (18-34), strategically planned to meet young people where they are (places of work, campuses, nearby museums, and restaurants). This especially applies to addressing and communicating the disproportionate burden of these viruses on young people from BIPOC communities.

## **Workforce Development**

### ***1. Equitably Expand Work-Based Learning Opportunities for All***

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#### **Increase Funding, Seats, and Partnerships for State and City Internships \***

While helpful, a college degree does not guarantee future employment. Thus, when polled, our college students clearly indicate a top concern of needing more internship and work-based learning opportunities. These jobs are crucial for low-income students who cannot afford to take unpaid internship opportunities. City and state work-based learning programs are key to social mobility and economic opportunity for budding professionals and tradespeople. Yet, such programs are still very limited in budget, scope, and accessibility for undocumented students.

## **Civic Engagement**

### ***1. Expand the involvement of young adults in civic activities***

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#### **Encourage SUNY and CUNY institutions to grant course credit to students who serve as election inspectors, poll clerks, or election coordinators (S9058)**

Although some programs already offer this, many programs and schools do not incentivize students to help support their local election sites. The experiences of being a poll worker, election inspector, or poll coordinator can provide students with deep experiential learning and a greater appreciation for the process and civic duty. Our state and city institutions should help reward and incentivize this learning experience and vital civic service with course credit.



### **Encourage Young Adult Voices and Power via Advisory Boards & More\***

An immense dearth of generational diversity plagues not only our national elected offices but also our state and local politics. Our young advocates, team, and alumni regularly participate in civic events, such as public hearings, meetings with legislators, and community forums, but, at the end of the day, we are still not the ones making the budgetary or policy decisions that affect us. It is our mission to amplify the voices of young adults in the political process, and one of the most important ways that we can do that is by providing opportunities for more young people to learn about our city and state public offices, pushing for more government youth (young adult) advisory boards, and encouraging young adults to be the change they want to see.

## **Economic (Justice) Opportunity for All**

### **Establish the New York state community commission on reparations (A2619A/S7215)**

Enormous wealth gaps are prevalent among New Yorkers, along both generational and racial divides. Skyrocketing costs of living, especially for rent and home-buying, have long made parts of New York and New York City, especially, virtually inaccessible for Black young adults. We know that the root of this wealth gap is in our nation's history and New York state's history of slavery, Jim Crow practices, and modern discrimination in financial lending and home buying. Thus, we urge New York to lead with states like California and take the steps needed to enact reparations.