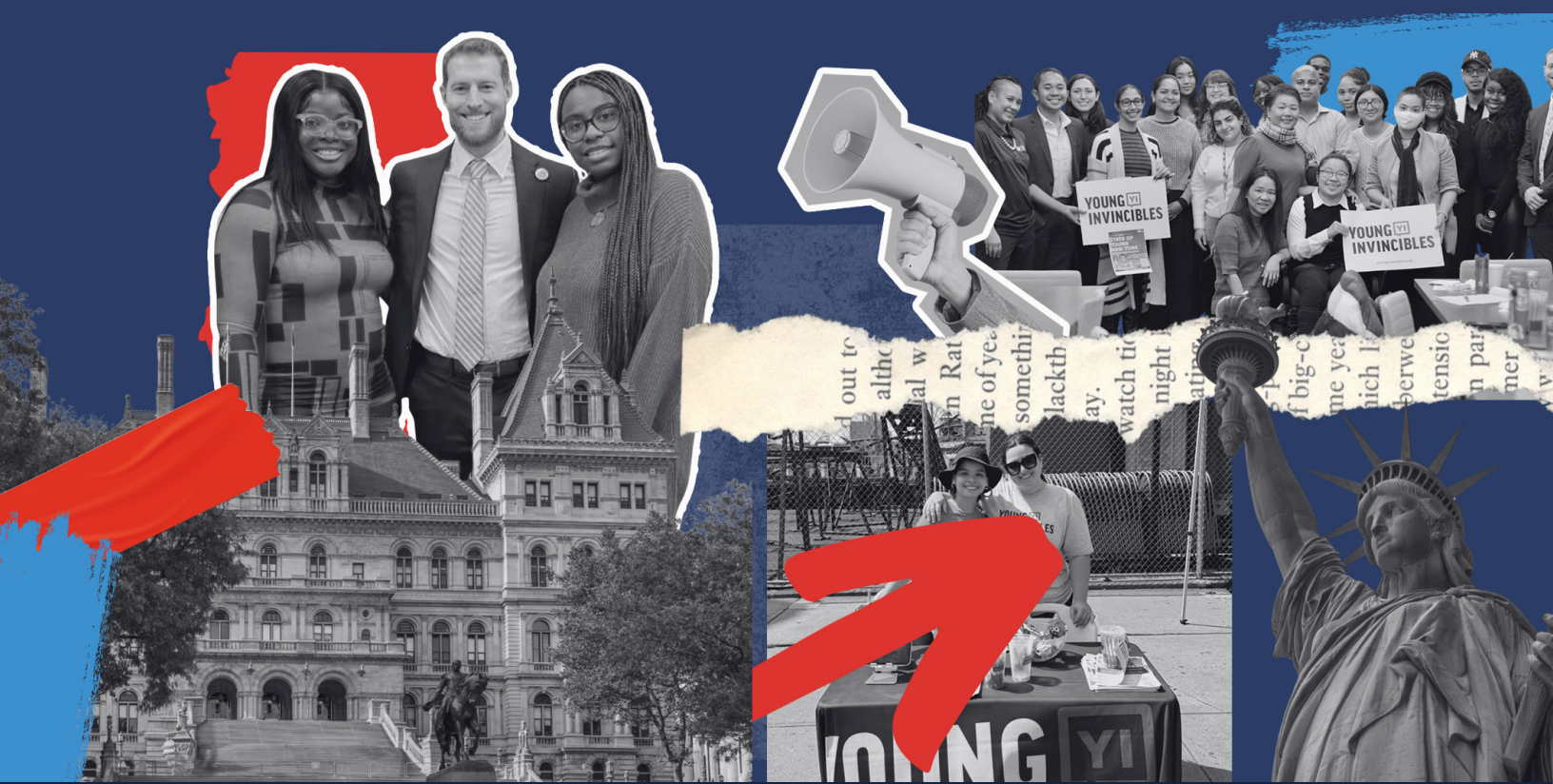


New York Policy Agenda



2025 New York State Policy Agenda

In the past, we've noted how continuing economic challenges make it incredibly difficult for young adults, ages 18-34, to build financial security and mobility. In New York City especially, the immense cost of living, rent, inflated tuition costs, student debt, and medical debt are huge issues. We've shined light on how the defunding of public colleges and basic needs programs continues to exacerbate inequity, food and housing insecurity, student homelessness, and the

crisis state of our fragmented mental health system. In 2025, our institutions of education, healthcare, and workforce opportunity face novel attacks and potential closures under Project 2025. Equally concerning are the attacks on specific marginalized communities that we expect, especially against the rights of immigrant students and families, young LGBTQIA+ folx, students with disabilities, communities of color, and DEI programs.



Passing the Equal Rights Amendment in 2024 was a huge win for codifying protections against discrimination in New York. This year, we must enact similar legal, policy, and budgetary structures to protect our most vulnerable young people and communities. We must invest more boldly than ever in young adult voices and policies that empower them in the political process.

The following policy agenda items are thus aimed at securing the financial wellness and rights of young adults by improving the affordability and accessibility of higher education and health care, expanding workforce development, and comprehensively aligning institutional supports. Our priorities were chosen by centering young adult input from our New York Young Advocates Program, Youth Advisory Board, alumni, partners, and with [YI's mission and values](#) in mind.

2025 Policy Priorities:

Higher Education

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

Increase Access to Campus Mental Health Supports

Invest in Campus Mental Health Counseling (A04142)

[Studies consistently show](#) that mental health challenges are a top reason that students pause or end college enrollment. Telehealth partnerships help address the demand for mental health support, especially for mental health crises, these programs often cannot provide consistent care for students needing weekly or bi-weekly meetings with the same caring professional. To support students' health and college persistence, we must increase 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, [per recommendation from The American School Counselor Association \(ASCA\)](#). At some schools, like Hunter College, the ratio is supposedly so high (1:7,000) that students must wait weeks to months for a meeting with a mental health counselor, even in times of crisis. We must also prioritize hiring more counselors of color, especially at CUNY, who reflect the demographics of the student population and can provide culturally affirming care. CUNY and SUNY institutions can also utilize [Benefits Data Trust's free Toolkit](#) to identify Medicaid enrollment gaps and the free [Healthy Minds Checklist/campus designation](#) to increase campus mental health policies and communications.

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 and develop systems solutions. This also includes identifying the administrative obstacles institutions face in implementing benefits programs such as SNAP enrollment. Board membership should be at least half comprised of students with lived experience with basic needs insecurity. Other members should be experts in social work, service administration, and community partners.

Increase Access to Campus Food and SNAP Benefits

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, food pantries at every CUNY and SUNY campus must be transformed into centers where students can be assessed for other essential needs resource programs, such as housing support, mental health service referrals, and more. FAFSA information should be proactively used to reach out to SNAP-eligible students.

Housing Security for All Students

Create Campus Housing Liaisons And Waive Application Fees for Students Experiencing Basic Needs Insecurity or Homelessness In CUNY ([A4029/S4247/S4248](#))

Nearly 15 percent of New York’s public college students had experienced homelessness in 2019, when rent rates were drastically lower. 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 designate housing liaisons at all CUNY and SUNY campuses. SUNY is already piloting this. ([See our Report for information and recommendations for addressing youth homelessness](#))

In addition, CUNY could contract with more affordable and free housing providers (e.g. [NCS Scholars](#)) and prevent increases in housing costs by further subsidizing them. Housing assistance can also be determined on a sliding scale based on family income and/or ACE/ASAP status.

»»» 2. Support Making College More Accessible and Affordable

Institute a Postsecondary Equity Funding Formula

Our public colleges vary tremendously in the extent to which they enroll and graduate marginalized populations. We propose that the state enact an equity funding formula that progressively incentivizes, rewards, and strengthens our institutions that serve large amounts of low-income, first-generation, Black, and/or Hispanic students. The formula would ideally be based on the institution’s performance (graduation rates) and demographic composition.

Create a SUNY Reconnect Program and Expand CUNY Reconnect

The [CUNY Reconnect Program](#) has so far been successful in increasing both CUNY enrollment and degree completion rates for adults/non-traditional students. The combination of additional resources and financial support makes it easier for prior students to return and complete the remaining courses in their degree program. We propose increased investment to market and scale this program at CUNY and creating/piloting a similar program for SUNY schools.

Help Eliminate Direct-to-School Debt and Public Colleges' Punitive Collections

Former students who owe their public college or university money are prevented from readmission and sometimes sued years after graduation for their institutional debt by for-profit colleges (or by the OAG for SUNY debts). Completing their degree makes it more likely a student can secure a living wage job and repay their debt. Those debts can go to collections agencies, further hurting those students' financial security by lowering their credit scores and even leading to garnished wages. Rather than blocking readmittance and aggressively pursuing students who are unable to pay their outstanding school fees, our postsecondary institutions should allow one-time exemptions for students attempting to return and complete their studies, prohibit certain harmful debt collection practices, and reimburse certain outstanding fees for community colleges. A California bill, [AB1160](#), provides one legislative model for how this could be codified.

Help Ensure Equitable Implementation of Universal FAFSA supports statewide

This is NY's first year requiring high-school seniors to either complete the [FAFSA](#), a [DREAM Act](#) application, or opt-out via a signed waiver from a parent or guardian. We must ensure that counselors and administrators in the K-12 system are supporting students in completing the new FAFSA form and providing accessible resources in multiple languages for families to better understand FAFSA and how their financial information is protected. Studies show that increasing FAFSA completion positively correlates with college attendance, retention, and completion, especially for first-generation and ELL college students. We must also focus on ensuring that potential first-generation and NY DREAM Act students have accurate and encouraging communications and state financial aid access given deportation threats to mixed-status families.

Free Public College: First 60 Credits & The New Deal for CUNY (A4425/S2146)*

CUNY schools used to be free. Our state has disinvested in CUNY for decades, however, pushing costs onto students while cutting critical services. We must re-invest in our nation's greatest engine of social mobility with The New Deal for CUNY, which provides students with free tuition, increased mental health and academic counseling, more full-time faculty, and desperately needed investments in campus buildings. As a step toward this, we could also provide the first 60 credits at CUNY free, ideally on a first-dollar basis, making CUNY enrollment accessible to all.

Expand eligibility for the TAP to graduate students (S5447)

Advanced degrees are increasingly needed to be competitive in today's economy due to degree inflation and industry specialization. Financial aid for graduate students can also help address inequity and shortages in health care and public service jobs, investing in New York's workforce.

Expand Early College and Dual-Enrollment Opportunities

High school students with at least some degree of college course experience are more likely to graduate, attend college, and persist. Early college and dual enrollment courses are also often free, saving students and families thousands of dollars and up to two years toward a postsecondary degree. Their value is immense for working-class students and families, especially compared to remedial courses - which cost students more money and time. We must expand existing early college opportunities (e.g. CUNY College Now), unify our collective definitions for early college and dual enrollment programs, and forge new partnerships for early college. For more information and the latest data/reports, visit <https://www.ny4ecp.org/>

REPAIR Act Bills ([S7797](#) & [S7798/A8478](#) & [A8479](#))

repairny.org/about

Columbia University and New York University (NYU) are the two largest private landowners in New York City. These private elite/Ivy school endowments total roughly \$20 billion combined, yet each year they forgo hundreds of millions of dollars in property taxes and city funds. This package of legislation would require both institutions to instead pay property taxes directly to the CUNY system, helping to REPAIR harmful budget shortages for our city’s 25 public colleges.

3. *Build Equitable Pathways to College Completion*

Pass the Fair College Admissions Act ([S4170](#) & [A1378](#)) nycoalitionforfairadmissions.org

Guaranteeing 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. Studies show 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*

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 provide comprehensive health coverage for all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status. It would eliminate coverage gaps and affordability burdens, while finally ending our health care system’s deference to insurance companies with a single-payer universal health care system.

2. *Prevent Medical Debt and Predatory Collection Practices*

Pass the Ounce of Prevention Act ([A6027/S1366](#))

Hospital financial assistance applications and processes vary tremendously, causing millions of low-income patients to be confused about and miss out on financial assistance. Whatsmore, over 53,000 New Yorkers were sued by nonprofit hospitals between 2015 and 2020, in addition to thousands at the height of the pandemic. Hospital lawsuits are disproportionately filed against patients who live in low-income communities of color. This bill would address these issues in a few ways. It requires all hospitals in New York to adopt

a uniform financial assistance application and policy to simplify the process for patients to apply and be eligible for financial assistance; and conditioning the distribution of state Indigent Care Pool (ICP) funds to the hospitals based on implementation and compliance with the policy. Hospitals would also be required to legally certify that any patient who will be sued for medical debt was ineligible for financial assistance.

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

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. We must ensure 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. This would help ensure that abortion care in New York is accessible to folks from out of state, asylum seekers and undocumented folks, and anyone requiring logistical support.

Contact us for more on our work:

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