

## **Criminal Justice Reform Priorities for 2026**

Rev. Jim Ketcham and Elder Chibueze Okorie, Co-Chairs

**Raise the Age** is likely to be challenged based on claims by some politicians that there are too many youths committing violent crimes. Violent crimes by youth have dropped to 30-year lows. We recommend defending Raise the Age against these false fears. Anecdotes, no matter how shocking, are not facts on which effective policy can be built. Further, we insist that full programming be provided to youthful offenders, as the law is written. Many of the extra youth programs which were funded in the budget still haven't been implemented! Our coalition partners describe the law here: <https://raisetheagency.org/> Here is a link to reasons **not** to rollback Raise the Age:

[https://raisetheagency.org/publication/?post\\_type=press\\_and\\_media&post\\_id=20162](https://raisetheagency.org/publication/?post_type=press_and_media&post_id=20162)

**HALT** (Humane Alternatives to Long Term Solitary Confinement) is also likely to be challenged. It has never been fully implemented, and DOCCS needs to find something other than solitary confinement ("Special Housing Units," or SHU) to manage problem behavior. People should be linked to programs, not cut off from human interaction. Solitary confinement, as currently practiced, is far more likely to exacerbate mental illness and anti-social behavior than put incarcerated individuals on the path to wholeness and healing. Here is a good description of the controversy over HALT from Albany Law School:

<https://www.albanylaw.edu/government-law-center/explaining-the-halt-act>

Governor Hochul signed the **Criminal Justice Omnibus bill**. Chapter amendments include adding only 2 more members to the Commission on Corrections and leaving all appointments in the Governor's control.

This will still increase oversight of NY prisons and jails, including by changing the composition of the State Commission of Correction, providing CANY increased access, tolling the statute of limitations for people to file claims for harm suffered in custody, and other measures.

We've also been working with Ronnie Minter, founder of Freedom Unshackled, trying to find a way to get some **civilian oversight of the Albany County Jail**, where unsanitary conditions and beatings have been reported quite frequently. Sheriff Apple is an independently elected official, and the County Legislature has very little power to make him change anything. Sheriff Apple denies that beatings are happening, but the County has been paying hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars to settle multiple complaints.

Because of the County Legislature's limited power over the sheriff, we met with Senator Salazar's staff, to draft a state bill that could require **all** county correctional facilities in NYS to have some kind of civilian oversight. Assemblymember Romero will be a cosponsor. The bill has now been introduced. It is **S8856 (Salazar) and A9617 (Romero)**

The Omnibus bill could help in all county facilities, as well.

Here are the priorities of our other coalition allies that we support:

**Communities Not Cages Coalition** ([communitiesnotcagesny.org](http://communitiesnotcagesny.org))

**The Marvin Mayfield Act:** Mandatory minimum sentencing drives mass incarceration, strips judges of discretion, and grants outsized power to prosecutors to coerce guilty pleas. This bill will eliminate

mandatory minimum sentences, including New York's two- and three-strike laws, allowing judges to consider the individual factors in a case. In doing so, the Marvin Mayfield Act (S.1209 - Myrie / A.1297-Meeks) will finally undo the harms of the Rockefeller Drug Law era.

**The Second Look Act:** (S.158 - Salazar / A.1283 - Walker) will allow judges to review and reconsider excessive sentences. Under current sentencing laws, incarcerated people have no opportunity to demonstrate to a judge that they have transformed while incarcerated or to seek a reconsideration of their sentences based on changes in law and norms. The Second Look Act will allow incarcerated people to apply for a resentencing hearing after they have served 10 years or half of their sentence.

**Earned Time Act:** Following the federal 1994 Crime Bill, New York State slashed programs for incarcerated people and dramatically limited the time people could earn off their sentences. The Earned Time Act (S.342 - Cooney / A.1085 - Kelles) will strengthen and expand "good time" and "merit time" laws to encourage personal transformation in prison and reunite families. "Good time" has often been arbitrarily erased due to minor infractions of prison rules.

We join with **RAPP** ([rappcampaign.com](http://rappcampaign.com)) Release Aging People in Prison in supporting the following:

**Elder Parole:** Provides incarcerated people aged 55 and older who have already served 15 or more years an opportunity for parole release consideration. This includes some of the state's oldest and sickest incarcerated people. (S.454/A.514) (Hoylman-Sigal/Davila)

**Fair and Timely Parole:** Provides a more meaningful parole review process for incarcerated people who are already parole-eligible and ensures that people are evaluated for release based on who they are today, including their rehabilitation, personal transformation and their current risk of violating the law. All too often the Parole Board looks only at the original crime (the one thing that cannot be changed) and refuses parole.

**A Fully Staffed Parole Board:** The Parole Board must be staffed with 19 commissioners as the law allows and should be comprised of people who share our values of redemption, transformation and mercy. Commissioners must reflect the identities of incarcerated people and come from professional and clinical backgrounds including social work, nursing, reentry services, and other fields that allow them to evaluate incarcerated people for who they are today. S159 – Salazar/A127 – Weprin

**13thForward** ([13thForward.com](http://13thForward.com)) Named for the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the US Constitution which bans slave labor -- except as a form of punishment -- has the following priorities we also support:

**Prison Wage Act:** Guarantees that incarcerated workers are paid an hourly wage that is at least half the state minimum wage. S439B (Myrie) / A3596B (Gibbs). Prison workers are currently paid pennies per hour.

**No Slavery in NY Act:** Amends the New York Civil Rights Law to make clear that all forms of slavery, forced labor, and involuntary servitude are prohibited in the state, and amends the Correction Law to expressly prohibit the use of force, threats of force, and any other threats of punishment as means to compel the labor of incarcerated people. S7282 (Myrie) / A7873 (Meeks).

**Fairness & Opportunity for Incarcerated Workers Act:** Establishes a New York State prison labor board to ensure that all labor programs comply with the requirements of New York labor law and that work opportunities on the inside lead to real opportunities post-release; and eliminates the preferred vendor status of *Corcraft*, the “industry” run by NY Dept of Corrections. S1208 (Myrie)

*Corcraft* has built almost all the furniture found in state offices, legislators’ offices, public schools, court houses and elsewhere. Because their labor costs are so low (pennies an hour), they can offer much lower prices to purchasing agents. But any skills learned working for *Corcraft* are unlikely to be used in the outside world as office furniture is made in only a very few locations in the US. There are also examples of incarcerated individuals learning advanced skills maintaining aging prison electric and plumbing systems, but they are unable to use those skills in the outside world due to every expensive licensing requirements. And there’s not much call for workers skilled at making license plates or traffic signs in the outside world!

**Commissary Bill:** Places a cap on commissary prices, allowing only a 3% increase in cost for items, and requiring other cost cutting measures to keep commissary prices from offsetting any wage increases for workers. S1692 (Ramos) / A2592 (People-Stokes). Incarcerated individuals must buy their own personal care items and any extra food they need beyond the limited diet they are fed through the prison commissary. Prices there are much higher than prices in your local drug store or supermarket, and the selection is much smaller. The constant rise in prices and the limited selection of goods available in the commissary only contributes to the issues of contraband and black markets in NYS prisons.

## **Economic Justice Priorities for 2026**

Ms. Rashida Tyler, Chair

*“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” — Micah 6:8*

Micah does not present justice as optional charity. It is not philanthropy or episodic generosity. It is a requirement. The biblical concept of justice (*mishpat*) calls us to restore right relationships and repair systems that disadvantage the poor, the stranger, and the laborer. To do justice means confronting structures that perpetuate poverty and wealth concentration. To love kindness means public policy that reflects steadfast love for families, workers, immigrants, and children. To walk humbly means recognizing that power and wealth are entrusted for the common good.

Christian social teaching affirms that economic systems must serve human dignity. Scripture insists wages be fair, that families not be crushed by debt, and that extreme wealth accumulation alongside deprivation is a moral crisis. For the New York State Council of Churches, economic justice is theological. It is discipleship expressed in public life.

New York’s economy produces immense wealth, yet too many families cannot afford the basics. Median household income is about \$85,820 (2024 ACS 1-year), while 14.0% of New Yorkers live in poverty—

millions of our neighbors. At the same time, New York’s inequality remains among the nation’s worst: the Fiscal Policy Institute reports New York’s income inequality rose again in 2024 and remains the highest of any state.

This hardship is intensified by an upside-down tax burden. A widely cited FPI analysis finds that households under \$100,000 pay higher effective state and local tax rates (about 10.4%–12%) than the richest 1% (about 8.1%), largely because sales and property taxes fall hardest on working families. In practice, everyday wage earners face payroll taxes and consumption taxes on essentials, while the wealthiest can rely more on capital income and tax-advantaged structures.

Meanwhile, paychecks have not kept up with the cost of living. Inflation has cooled but still squeezes budgets: the NYC metro CPI was up 2.9% over the 12 months ending January 2026. Even when nominal wages rise, families experience “phantom gains” because groceries, rent, childcare, and utilities rise faster than wages for many low- and middle-income households. FPI’s analysis of wage trends highlights that wage growth and income gains are not evenly shared—and that inequality keeps widening.

For immigrant communities, these pressures are often compounded by job insecurity, wage theft, language barriers, and exclusion from safety-net supports—making fair tax policy, strong worker protections, and meaningful family supports central to a moral economic agenda. 2026 Legislative Priorities

New York does not lack wealth. It lacks equitable distribution of responsibility and opportunity. A faithful 2026 legislative agenda must reduce child poverty, support working families, ensure the wealthy contribute fairly, protect workers, and promote transparent governance.

1) Expand the Empire State Child Credit (cut child poverty; boost family stability)

**S9077 / A10126** — Expands eligibility and increases the amounts of the Empire State Child Credit. Direct cash support is one of the most effective anti-poverty tools, helping families pay for food, diapers, transit, and rent. This legislation will help increase family economic security while reducing child poverty.

2) Universal Child Care Act (make work possible; stabilize childcare workforce)

**S3415A / A5899** — Establishes the Universal Child Care Act, including funding structures and implementation mechanisms. Childcare costs block parents from stable employment and trap families in poverty.

3) Billionaire “Mark-to-Market” Tax (fair revenue for shared wellbeing)

**S165 / A3632** — Establishes a billionaire mark-to-market tax on residents with \$1B+ in net assets (taxing certain unrealized gains). New York can fund childcare, housing, health, and worker protections by asking those with extreme wealth to contribute more—especially in a state with historic inequality.

4) End the Stock Transfer Tax Rebate (restore revenue for public investment)

**S1237 / A1494** — Repeals the rebates for stock transfer tax paid and directs funds to public purposes. The bill helps to reclaim resources from high-volume financial speculation to invest in communities, infrastructure, and essential services.

5) Wage theft / worker pay protections (defend workers, including immigrants)

**S4473** — Clarifies and strengthens statutory damages related to wage violations (reinforcing protections against wage theft). Wage theft is an economic justice issue and a moral issue—workers must receive the full fruit of their labor (James 5:4). Immigrant workers are often at heightened risk. Strong enforcement helps honest employers and stabilizes household budgets.

6) Strengthen Protections Against Wage Theft (**S4473**)

Strengthen statutory damages and enforcement mechanisms to protect workers' earned wages.

### **Good Government is Economic Justice**

Economic justice requires transparency and accountability. Corruption and weak oversight undermine investments meant to serve vulnerable communities.

- Support the extension of a Monitor for Orange County, NY to ensure continued oversight and protection of civil rights

## **Environmental Justice Priorities for 2026**

Rev. John Paarlberg, Chair

The Christian ethic is summarized in the commandments to love God with all one's being and to love one's neighbor as oneself. That means taking concrete, practical steps to care for God's creation and to work for the well-being of our neighbors, especially those who are most vulnerable. The climate crisis presents one of the greatest threats to humanity and indeed, all of creation.

We know that carbon dioxide levels must remain at 350 parts per million (ppm) to maintain a stable climate and avoid catastrophic warming. Before the industrial revolution and the extensive use of fossil fuels the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was about 280 parts per million. Last week (2/18/2026) carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere measured at Hawaii's Mauna Loa Observatory, were over 430 ppm.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has determined that we have until 2030 to dramatically reduce fossil fuel consumption if we are to avoid a climate catastrophe. "Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a livable future," they reported. Every year that passes without a drastic reduction in global emissions makes catastrophe more certain.

A failure to address the climate crisis is a failure to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. It is the "least of these among us"—the poor, the marginalized, communities of color, our children and

grandchildren, and many of our fellow creatures — who will suffer the gravest effects of climate chaos. Many of the other challenges we face—in immigration, housing, human health, and regional conflicts will be greatly exacerbated by the climate crisis.

Seeking justice for the marginalized and caring for the earth are inextricably bound together. “We are faced not with two separate crises,” wrote Pope Francis, “one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” (*Laudato Si*, 139).

The urgency of the climate crisis demands that we do as much as we can, as rapidly as we can, and in every way we can, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition as rapidly as possible to renewable energy systems, while at the same time ensuring that poor and marginalized communities are not left behind. With the federal government having largely abandoned its responsibility in addressing the climate crisis, it is incumbent on individual states to take decisive action.

### **INCREASING SOLAR ENERGY CAPACITY**

One of the most effective, affordable and expeditious ways to both reduce fossil fuel emissions and meet New York’s growing energy needs is to increase the state’s solar energy capacity. The New York State Council of Churches supports legislation which would expedite the transition to solar energy. One way to do that is to streamline the permitting process and ease connection to the grid. These permitting and connection regulations are in the hands of cities and states—not the federal government. According to an October 2025 report by Permit Power—a nonprofit focused on addressing this problem—published [a study](https://permitpower.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/35/2025/10/Cheap-as-our-peers-1.pdf?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email) that found that streamlined solar permitting nationwide could deliver \$1,600 in annual electricity cost savings for the average family, \$1.2 trillion in cost savings for the whole country over the next 25 years, and 18.2 million more rooftop solar installations by 2040. [https://permitpower.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/35/2025/10/Cheap-as-our-peers-1.pdf?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://permitpower.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/35/2025/10/Cheap-as-our-peers-1.pdf?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email)

### **THE ACCELERATE SOLAR FOR AFFORDABLE POWER (ASAP) ACT (A8758A Barrett/S6570A Harckham)**

raises New York’s distributed solar capacity goal (residential, commercial, and community solar) from 10 gigawatts to 20 gigawatts by 2035. (The Climate Leadership and Protection Act originally had a goal of 6 GW by 2025, which the State met more than a year ahead of schedule and millions of dollars under budget.) It also directs the Public Service Commission to enact reforms to the utility interconnection process to ensure that new distributed energy resources can be integrated more quickly and cost-effectively. With the end of federal clean energy support programs and rising utility costs, state leadership is necessary to ensure continued access to affordable and reliable energy for all New Yorkers. The ASAP Act is projected to result in \$50 billion in direct utility bill savings (an average electricity savings of \$87 annually for upstate residential customers and \$46 annually for downstate residential customers) and would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 145 million metric tons. Distributed solar and energy storage are among the most effective tools for reducing energy costs for New Yorkers and at the same time significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

**THE SOLAR UP NOW NEW YORK ACT (SUNNY) ACT (A9111 Gallagher/S8512 Krueger)** exempts small-scale balcony or plug-in solar from interconnection and net metering requirements and prohibits utilities from requiring customers to obtain approval for using such a device or paying any related fee. This will give many renters, homeowners and businesses the ability to generate electricity to meet part of their personal needs, lowering their cost. If deployed today an 800W plug-in solar system paired with a portable battery would generate yearly savings of \$279 for the average NYC family.

**THE SOLAR TAX CREDIT INCREASE (S2626 Harckham/(A1373 Walker)** increases the residential solar tax credit from \$5,000 to \$10,000 and provides a rebate option for people whose income is too low to allow for a tax credit. This would accelerate the adoption of residential solar and make it more accessible for lower-income residents.

**THE STOP CLIMATE POLLUTER HANDOUTS ACT (S3606 Krueger/A3675 Simon)** Currently, New York State provides approximately \$1.8 billion in tax exemptions annually to the fossil fuel industry. The Stop Climate Polluter Handouts Act would eliminate 20% (or \$350 million) of those tax breaks, sending a clear signal that the state will no longer subsidize industries and practices that cause harm by contributing to the climate crisis. Eliminating these subsidies will also lower the burden on taxpayers, help close the budget gap and move us towards our climate goals. The Act preserves tax breaks that benefit the public, so the average lower- or middle-income New Yorker will not be significantly impacted, and job losses are not expected. In order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we must stop relying on fossil fuels; a key step is to stop subsidizing the industries that produce them.

**RENEWABLE CAPITOL ACT (A3466 Romero/S4842 Fahy)** The Renewable Capitol Act requires the Office of General Services (OGS) and the New York Power Authority (NYPA) to ensure that the state-owned buildings that run on the Sheridan Avenue Steam Plant transition to renewable energy systems within three years. Converting the state Capitol to 100% clean renewable energy is a critical environmental and racial justice issue. The communities of Sheridan Hollow and Arbor Hill have suffered for decades as a result of pollution caused by burning fuels (at various times coal, oil, gas, and garbage) used to power the Capitol Complex. We urge the legislature to include the Renewable Capitol Act in the budget and to adhere to the three-year timeline for converting the Empire State Plaza complex to renewable energy systems.

**PACKAGING REDUCTION AND RECYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE ACT (A1749 Glick/S1464 Harckham)** An average of 6.8 million tons of packaging waste is produced each year in New York State, constituting 40% of the total waste stream. Unlike aluminum, paper, and glass which are recycled more successfully, only about 5% of U.S. plastic waste is properly recycled. Moreover, most plastics are recycled only once or twice before being disposed of in landfills or incinerators. Much of today's recycling is merely postponing final disposal, not preventing waste. And because single-use plastic is produced from fossil fuels, extracting and creating these plastics emits vast amounts of greenhouse gases. Today, about 4-8% of annual global oil consumption is associated with plastics, according to the World Economic Forum. If this reliance on plastics persists, plastics will account for 20% of oil consumption by 2050. Some [98 per cent of single-use plastic produced](#) today is made of petrochemicals. [Plastic pollution | UNEP - UN Environment Programme](#) The extraction and transport of those fossil fuels, and the manufacturing and

disposal of plastics, all create carbon emissions that are responsible for global warming. The manufacture, transport and incineration of plastics produces four times more greenhouse gas emissions than global aviation.

Plastic pollution is a serious health concern. Microplastics and nanoplastics have been found in the human heart, brain, liver, kidney, reproductive organs, and breast milk. A March 2024 study published in the New England Journal of Medicine found microplastics in plaque in human carotid arteries, increasing risks of stroke, heart attack, and premature death. Other research showed that nanoplastics may trigger brain changes linked to Parkinson's disease and some types of dementia.

<https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/new-research-links-nanoplastics-parkinsons-and-some-types-dementia>

Plastic pollution is an issue of economic and racial justice. New York taxpayers spend 100s of millions of dollars a year transporting waste by truck or by rail to other places to be burned. New York has 10 active waste incinerators, 7 of which are located in environmental justice communities (communities of color or low-income communities who face disproportionate and unequal environmental burdens). Frontline communities living near chemical and plastic producing plants, as well as incinerators and landfills, face higher rates of cancer, asthma, childhood leukemia, low birth weight, and other serious health issues.

The only way to curb these carbon emissions, mitigate plastic pollution, and address these environmental justice issues is to significantly reduce the manufacture and use of plastics.

The Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act would require companies to:

- Reduce their packaging by 30% gradually over the next 12 years.
- Require 75% of the remaining packaging to be reused or recycled by 2052.
- Ban the most toxic chemicals currently used in packaging.
- Prohibit incineration and so-called "chemical recycling" from counting as recycling
- Require the businesses that sell packaged consumer goods (Amazon, McDonalds, Pepsi, Kraft, etc.), to pay modest fees on packaging that encourage producers to design for reuse and recyclability.
- Require these producer fees to cover municipalities' costs of waste management and recycling.

Exemptions include all companies that gross less than \$5 million in sales annually, medical packaging, packaging of hazardous or flammable products, beverage containers that have a deposit and are covered by the Returnable Container Law, among other exemptions.

A recent study from Beyond Plastics showed that New Yorkers would save \$1.1 billion in just one decade after the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act becomes law, all the while addressing a growing threat to public health and the environment.

A related bill: **LEASH THE LID (S8600 Sutton/A9354 Colton)** requiring caps to be attached to plastic bottles, is already a law in the European Union. Besides reducing litter and improving recycling, this step would prevent accidental deaths, especially in young children, from choking.

**CORPORATE MONEY OUT OF POLITICS** [A9233/Lasher](#) [S8613/Gonzales](#) Many industries (ExxonMobil, Dow, Shell, McDonald’s, and Coca-Cola) are lobbying in opposition to the PRRIA. Even though the plastics bill passed the Senate and had more than 75 sponsors in the Assembly, last year it was never brought to the floor--probably because of the influence of corporate campaign contributions from the plastics and fossil fuel industries. This year the bill has 78 co-sponsors in the state Assembly and 32 co-sponsors in the state Senate. It needs 76 Assembly and 32 Senate votes to pass on both floors. This proposed legislation would limit corporate contributions toward election and ballot-issue activity.

## **Housing Justice Priorities for 2026**

Ms. Rashida Tyler, Chair

*"Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." — Amos 5:24*

The Bible and Christian social teachings make it clear that housing the homeless and building affordable homes are matters of justice, not merely charity. Scripture affirms that every human being is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and therefore possesses inherent dignity that must be protected in both personal action and public policy. The prophets repeatedly condemn societies that tolerate exploitation and neglect of the poor (Isaiah 58; Amos 5:24), teaching that authentic worship requires structural righteousness. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus identifies himself with those who lack shelter—"I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35)—making care for the unhoused a direct expression of faithfulness to Christ. Christian social teaching further emphasizes the common good and the preferential concern for the poor: a just society organizes its economic and political systems so that the most vulnerable are protected first. The early church shared possessions so "there was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:34), demonstrating that community well-being requires material stability. Supporting policies that create and preserve affordable housing therefore reflects core Christian commitments—human dignity, love of neighbor, stewardship of resources, and the moral responsibility of the government to promote justice and safeguard the vulnerable.

### **Snapshot of Housing Instability in New York State**

New York State is facing a housing crisis that is moral, economic, and structural. While housing production continues, tens of thousands of families remain unstable, and hundreds of thousands of extremely low-income households cannot access housing they can afford.

In 2024, more than 158,000 individuals across New York State were experiencing homelessness on a single winter night, including nearly 78,000 in New York City. Thousands were unsheltered. By early 2026, New York City’s shelter system housed more than 86,000 individuals on a single night, including over 30,000 children.

During the 2024–25 school year, approximately 154,000 New York City public school students experienced homelessness. Many were doubled up in overcrowded apartments. Across the state, nearly

2.9 million households are rent burdened, and roughly one in five households pays more than half of their income toward housing.

New York faces a deficit of more than 631,000 units affordable and available to extremely low-income renters earning below 30 percent of Area Median Income. For every 100 extremely low-income households, only about 36 affordable units exist. This is not simply a housing supply problem. It is a deep affordability crisis.

The New York State Council of Churches represents 7,500 congregations across the state. Churches operate food pantries, childcare programs, warming centers, and emergency shelters. They witness firsthand the consequences of housing instability: families doubled up, seniors choosing between rent and medication, and neighbors sleeping outside in freezing temperatures.

Emergency charity cannot replace systemic policy solutions. The crisis also affects the long-term vitality of our state. Population loss, workforce shortages, strained school systems, and housing costs that outpace wages all threaten New York's economic and demographic stability.

## **Conclusion**

Affordable housing is foundational to family stability, educational attainment, workforce participation, and community resilience. The Legislature has the opportunity to align housing policy with both economic necessity and moral responsibility by prioritizing deeply affordable housing, strengthening tenant protections, and empowering faith communities to be part of the solution. We need legislative support to remove structural barriers and make these projects feasible.

For these reasons NYSCOC supports the following Legislative bills:

## **Housing Creation**

**S3397 / A3647 — Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act:** The Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act enables religious institutions to develop affordable housing on property they own, even where local zoning restrictions currently prohibit residential construction. The bill establishes clear guidelines to allow by-right housing development when affordability requirements are met. Many houses of worship own underutilized land but face significant zoning barriers that prevent them from building housing. This legislation unlocks that land for community benefit, allowing faith communities to partner with developers and nonprofits to create deeply affordable housing while continuing their missions. It expands supply without requiring new land acquisition and removes unnecessary regulatory barriers.

**S2523 — Jobs and Housing Pilot Program Act:** This bill establishes a pilot program to promote the development and redevelopment of affordable housing while creating construction industry jobs. It supports housing production serving households earning up to 130 percent of area median income and links development with workforce opportunities. New York faces both a housing affordability crisis and a need for quality job creation. This legislation addresses both simultaneously by incentivizing housing construction that creates good-paying jobs, supports apprenticeships, and expands supply. Housing development can and should serve as an engine of economic growth.

## **Anti-Displacement**

**S568B / A4021A — Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP):** The Housing Access Voucher Program establishes a statewide rental assistance program administered by the Division of Housing and Community Renewal. Eligible households would receive vouchers ensuring they pay no more than 30 percent of their income toward rent. Rental assistance is one of the most effective tools to prevent homelessness and reduce rent burden. Many working New Yorkers — including teachers, nonprofit workers, childcare providers, seniors, and people with disabilities — pay far more than 30 percent of their income on housing. Fully funding and broadening eligibility for HAVP would stabilize families before they enter shelter systems and reduce long-term public costs.

**S401 — Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA):** The Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act establishes a right of first refusal for tenants when a rental building is offered for sale. Before a landlord can sell to a third party, tenants or a qualified tenant association must be given a meaningful opportunity to purchase the property. TOPA helps prevent displacement, preserve existing affordable housing, and stabilize communities. When buildings are sold to speculative investors, rents often rise and long-term tenants are pushed out. This legislation gives tenants a pathway to collective ownership or partnership with nonprofit developers, protecting affordability and promoting community wealth building.

**S1403-A — Winter Moratorium on Evictions Act:** This bill restricts the execution of residential eviction warrants during the winter months, when cold weather conditions create heightened risks for displaced households. Evicting families during the coldest months increases homelessness, strains emergency shelter systems, and places lives at risk. A winter moratorium is a humane, common-sense policy that prioritizes safety and public health while reducing emergency costs associated with winter displacement.

**S8595 — Foreclosure Calculation Standards:** This bill establishes clear standards for calculating the total amount owed in residential foreclosure actions. It requires detailed itemization of principal, interest, fees, costs, and other charges, ensuring transparency in court proceedings. Homeowners facing foreclosure often encounter unclear or inflated calculations of debt. Standardized and transparent accounting promotes fairness, strengthens due process protections, and ensures that foreclosure judgments are based on accurate and documented amounts. Greater clarity can also support alternatives to foreclosure when appropriate.

## **Immigration Justice Priorities for 2026**

*“For I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” — Matthew 25:35*

In Matthew 25, Jesus identifies himself with the stranger. The moral test of a society is how it treats those who arrive seeking safety, work, and stability. In New York State, immigrants are essential workers, small business owners, caregivers, farm laborers, and congregants. Yet fear now shapes daily life for many immigrant families.

When immigration enforcement actions occur near homes, workplaces, churches, schools, or social service sites, families withdraw from public life. Parents avoid medical appointments. Children stay home from school. Congregants stop attending worship. Housing instability and poverty deepens when wage earners are detained without warning. The Gospel calls us to welcome the stranger. Public policy must ensure that community spaces can operate without fear of enforcement actions that tear families apart.

### **Immigration Enforcement in New York**

Following the rescission of federal sensitive location protections in 2025, enforcement actions expanded into areas previously considered protected, including near houses of worship and schools. Reports from across New York describe fear and instability in immigrant neighborhoods.

Concerns have also been raised about coordination between local law enforcement and ICE in certain counties, including Broome County. When local officers are perceived as immigration agents, trust erodes and public safety suffers. In Chester, NY in the Hudson Valley ICE is attempting to purchase a warehouse to serve as a detention center. Families become reluctant to report crimes or engage with public institutions.

### **Conclusion**

The Immigration Working Group of the New York State Council of Churches affirms that welcoming the stranger is both a theological mandate and a public good. Protecting sensitive locations, ensuring access to legal representation, requiring transparency in enforcement, and limiting local participation in civil immigration detainers strengthen families, protect constitutional rights, and preserve community stability.

## **Legislative Priorities**

### **Protecting Our Sensitive Locations Act**

Senate Bill: **S4121** (Sen. Jackson) -- Currently in: Senate Codes (Chair: Sen. Zellnor Myrie)

Assembly Bill: **A8139** (Asm. Lasher) -- Currently in: Assembly Codes (Chair: Asm. Jeffrey Dinowitz)

Protects individuals from civil immigration enforcement actions within designated sensitive locations such as houses of worship, schools, healthcare facilities, and social service sites unless a judicial warrant authorizes the arrest. Restores state-level protections following the federal rescission of sensitive location guidance.

### **Access to Representation Act**

Senate Bill: **S141** (Sen. Hoylman-Sigal) -- Currently in: Senate Finance (Chair: Sen. Liz Krueger)/ Assembly Bill: **A270** (Asm. Cruz) -- Currently in: Assembly Codes (Chair: Asm. Jeffrey Dinowitz)

Establishes a right to legal counsel for low-income immigrants facing removal proceedings and creates a state-administered representation program. Strengthens due process, stabilizes families, and reduces housing displacement caused by detention and removal.

**Mandating End to Lawless Tactics (MELT) Act**

Senate Bill: **S8462** (Sens. Fahy, Salazar, Mayer, Krueger) -- Currently in: Senate Codes (Chair: Sen. Zellnor Myrie)/ Assembly Bill: **A8908** (Assembly sponsor pending) -- Currently in: Assembly Codes (Chair: Asm. Jeffrey Dinowitz)

Requires law enforcement officers, including federal immigration agents operating in New York, to clearly identify themselves and prohibits masked or anonymous civil immigration enforcement. Enhances transparency, accountability, and public trust.

**Prohibiting Status-Inquiries & Detainer-Based Detentions**

Senate Bill: **S2235A** (Sen. Gounardes) -- Currently in: Senate Codes (Chair: Sen. Zellnor Myrie); Assembly Bill: Companion legislation (2025) -- Currently in: Assembly Codes (Chair: Asm. Jeffrey Dinowitz)

Prevents state and local officers from questioning individuals about immigration status, honoring ICE detainers without judicial warrants, or transferring custody for civil immigration enforcement. Clarifies limits on local involvement in federal immigration actions and protects constitutional rights.