



AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE LEADERSHIP OF THE NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL OF  
CHURCHES TO

GOVERNOR KATHY HOCHUL  
ASSEMBLY SPEAKER CARL HEASTIE  
SENATE LEADER ANDREA STEWART COUSINS  
MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY  
MEMBERS OF THE SENATE

ON STATE BUDGET NEGOTIATIONS

April 2, 2023

Dear Governor Hochul, Senate Leader Stewart Cousins, Speaker Heastie, and Members of the New York Assembly and Senate:

As all of you work through the budget, we know you are under pressure from many constituencies with differing views about state budget priorities. We thank you for your efforts.

This letter from the leadership of the New York State Council of Churches reflects our faithful effort to offer our perspective on what should and should not be included in the final budget package.

Here is a brief summary of our positions on the budget as of Sunday, April 2.

**1. Housing**

We are calling for a grand-bargain on housing. We urge you to retain the Governor's [New York Housing Compact](#) including its proposed requirements on municipalities to increase housing production. We also want the Compact to require that more affordable housing be built. The Compact, however, must be complemented with tenant protections including:

- Strong provisions to prevent renters from being evicted without good cause.
- Increases in relief for renters (including public housing residents)
- A Housing Access Voucher program

- Funds and requirements to help renters, facing eviction, to pay for an attorney to represent them housing court.
- Expansion in capital investment in public housing
- Offering communities outside of New York City the same amount of HIV/AIDS housing assistance which is offered to NYC residents.

Please see our [commentary](#) which appeared in the *Empire Report*.

Also, here is the New York State Council's legislative ask on housing: [NYSCOC 2023 Housing Priorities for New York State](#)

## 2. Criminal Justice Reform

We emphatically call on the Governor and the legislature to not adopt any of the proposed changes to the current bail law. Adopting any of these changes will merely exacerbate racial inequality in our criminal justice system. The political manipulation of public opinion, which is not evidence based, is a distraction from focusing on other more effective solutions to address crime and recidivism. We also support bills to

- Make amends for Wrongful Conviction
- Expunge criminal records after 3 years for a misdemeanor and 6 years for a felony, after parole (Clean Slate)

Once the budget is completed, we urge passage of a constitutional amendment, proposed by 13Forward, to stop the practice of paying abysmally low wages to incarcerated people.

Please view our [Criminal Justice Reform Forum, Tuesday, March 28](#) describing our reasoning in considerable depth on all of these bills and more. The Forum also offers an overall legislative review. You can also review this [earlier forum on](#) many other criminal justice bills which are up for consideration post budget.

## 3. Environmental and Climate Justice

The Council strongly supports legislation to increase the state's ability to implement the provisions of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) while strengthening the social safety net. We also oppose other bills which weaken the CLCPA. We particularly bring your attention to the following:

- We support an All-Building Electrification Act that does not include the considerable restrictions in the Governor's proposal.
- We support an environmental superfund to assess 3 billion from fossil fuel companies to pay for remediation in communities most affected by climate change including black and brown communities.
- We support the 10-billion-dollar package to increase taxes on individuals and corporations most able to pay and we oppose regressive revenue raisers that fall disproportionately on middle class and low wealth New Yorkers (increase in state tuition,

payroll tax, and cigarette tax increases to name a few). The 10 billion, which includes the 3 billion in the Superfund Act and some revenue from the Governor's Cap and Invest program, will help to further the goals of the CLCPA while helping to strengthen the social safety net in New York.

- We rigorously oppose a last-minute proposal to considerably ease restrictions on methane emissions. Please see our separate [memo of opposition](#). Also, for reference, here is our [Climate and Environmental Justice Ask](#).

#### **4. Reducing Corporate Welfare and Making Bottom Up and Middle Out Investments**

We oppose, in general, increases in corporate subsidies which many studies show have negligible economic benefit. We think the money would be better spent on strengthening the safety net including but not limited to:

- An increase in the minimum wage to 21.25 an hour with indexing to inflation thereafter
- No outsourcing of state public sector jobs to private entities
- Investment in affordable housing
- Universal childcare including paying just wages for child-care workers
- Increase in wages for home homecare workers
- Investment in CUNY, SUNY Schools and Hospitals including reductions in tuition
- Investment in public schools
- Expansion of health care (including for undocumented people) including closing the Medicaid coverage gap.
- Expansion of mental health services as proposed by the Governor.
- Investment in help for the formerly incarcerated re-entering society
- Expansion of the child tax credit including for families with children under the age of four
- Wage theft protections detailed in the SWEAT bill (to be considered post budget)

We take a bottom up and middle out economic approach to the state budget (promoted by the Biden Administration) which is, in our view, a more effective approach to business expansion and job creation. We **do not** support widely discredited supply side “trickle down” economic strategies which retard business expansion and job growth and exacerbate wealth inequality while furthering regressive taxation including imbalances in our property tax system.

For more in depth analysis, please view our forums on [Economic Development, Wealth Inequality, and Taxes](#), [Labor and Wages](#), and [Health Care](#)

#### **5. Immigration**

We support the Governor's proposed billion dollars to assist asylee seekers. We think, however, that much more additional money needs to be allocated to communities outside of New York City to offer housing and services. In addition, we support more structural changes which address the needs of immigrants overall. Please see our immigration ask: [NYSCOC 2023 Immigrant Rights Priorities for New York State](#).

Thank you for your consideration. We pray for all of you as you juggle the many demands placed upon you to come up with a just budget which serves all New Yorkers.

In faith,

The Reverend Peter Cook, Executive Director  
Ms. Rashida Tyler, Deputy Executive Director

Mr. Gary VanKennen, President  
The Reverend Alan Dailey, Vice-President  
The Reverend Dr. William Wilkinson, Second Vice-President  
Mr. Frederick Jackson, Treasurer  
The Reverend Marti Swords Horrell, Secretary

Sister Danielle Bonetti, CSJ  
Sister Faith Colligan, DC  
Sister Catherine Darcy, RSM  
Bishop Mary Glasspool  
Ms. Dahlia Herring  
The Reverend Dr. Gideon Jebamani  
Mr. Robert Kazmayer  
The Reverend Jim Ketcham  
The Reverend Wolfgang Laudert  
The Reverend Dr. Cris Mogenson  
Elder Chibueze Okorie  
The Reverend Imani Olear  
The Reverend John Paarlberg  
The Reverend Grover Reddie  
The Reverend Petero Sabune  
The Reverend Tanya Spencer  
The Reverend Tim TenClay  
Mr. Alex Tindal Wiesendanger  
The Reverend Erwin Trollinger  
Ms. Melva Victorino