



2022-2023 Legislative Platform

VOCAL-NY is dedicated to ending the AIDS epidemic, drug war, mass incarceration and homelessness in New York State. We do this by building the power of low-income people directly impacted by these issues. We have chapters in New York City, Westchester, Albany, Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo.

The continued harm from criminalization, incarceration, and the legacy of former Governor Cuomo's austerity have resulted in a historic number of New Yorkers dying from preventable overdoses, record high homelessness, increased rates of hepatitis C and emerging HIV clusters. This session, our state must continue the momentum from last year and reverse these harms by decarceration and investing in housing, services and care for all New Yorkers.

Ending Criminalization and Building an Infrastructure of Harm Reduction and Care to Address the Surging Overdose Crisis:

- **Safer Consumption Services Act [S603/A224](#) (Rivera/Rosenthal):** Allows the New York State Department of Health to authorize community-based organizations to operate Overdose Prevention Centers which are controlled, sterile settings for people to use pre-obtained drugs under the supervision of trained professionals who can intervene in the event of an overdose, link people to counseling and health and social services, including drug treatment.
- **Decriminalize Life-saving Buprenorphine [S2524/A612](#) (Rivera/Rosenthal):** Research continually illustrates that non-prescribed buprenorphine use is directly correlated with lower risk of overdose. Because of stringent federal regulations and barriers to access, many people turn to non-prescribed buprenorphine to prevent withdrawal symptoms, self-detox, maintain abstinence, to bridge gaps in treatment, or attempt to enter treatment that may otherwise be inaccessible.
- **Decriminalize All Low-Level Drug Possession [S1284/A7109](#) (Rivera/Meeks):** Reclassifies low-level possession of a controlled substance from a misdemeanor to a non-criminal violation, with a maximum fine of \$50 which can be waived by participating in a needs assessment for services; expunges prior misdemeanor convictions; and establishes the Drug Decriminalization Task Force to develop recommendations for amending existing laws to match the intent of treating substance use as a public health issue, rather than a criminal-legal one.

Ending Homelessness:

- **Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) [S2804B/A9657B](#) (Kavanagh/Cymbrowitz):** A state-funded rental assistance program which dedicates at least 50% of the program's vouchers administered through public housing authorities to help homeless New Yorkers across the state find stable housing. The rest of the program's vouchers will go towards eviction prevention for tenants at risk of becoming homeless. If funded at 1 billion dollars it would create enough vouchers to get everyone currently in shelter access to a market rate rental subsidy, as well as prevent thousands of evictions a year.
- **Fully Fund the House Our Neighbors with Dignity Act (HONDA):** A program passed last year that supports the state and nonprofits to purchase financially distressed hotels and commercial spaces to convert them to rent stabilized, high quality, and permanently affordable and supportive housing for homeless and low-income New Yorkers. This year, New York State must invest \$500 million to fully fund this program, and to expand the program statewide to ensure upstate communities can convert distressed property into desperately needed affordable homes.
- **Enact the NYS20k Supportive Housing Plan:** We call on Governor Hochul to renew former Governor Cuomo's commitment to build 20,000 units of supportive housing over the next 15 years. We also must ensure that proper funding for our existing supportive housing is secured. The NYS20k plan calls for 14,000 newly constructed units, and 6,000 units preserved over the next 10 years.

Ending Mass Incarceration:

- **Fair and Timely Parole [S7514/A4231A](#) (Salazar/Weprin) & Elder Parole [S15A/A3475A](#) (Hoylman/De La Rosa)** would provide a more fair process for parole hearings and would ensure that the growing elderly population in New York State prisons has access to the parole board.
- **Challenging Wrongful Convictions [S266/A98](#) (Myrie/Quart):** New York State has had more wrongful convictions exposed than all but two other states and the cases we know about represent just the tip of the iceberg. Compounding the problem, New York has a unique ban on vacating convictions following a guilty plea, even in cases of actual innocence. Our state must reform CPL 440.10 to provide people with legitimate ways to challenge wrongful convictions in court, specifically with evidence that was withheld, or was otherwise unavailable, at trial.
- **Repealing Jim Crow Prison-Voting Bans [S3073/A6646](#) (Salazar/Epstein):** People incarcerated on a felony conviction are barred from voting in New York as a result of state constitutional changes stemming from the 1860s. No one should lose the right to vote.

- **Daniel's Law [S4814/A4697](#) (Brouk/ Bronson):** Named after a Black man in Rochester who was experiencing a mental health crisis when killed by police officers who responded, 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 become first responders to people experiencing behavioral health crises.
- **Ending Qualified Immunity [S1991/A4331](#) (Jackson/Hunter):** Removing the legal shield that prevents officers who deprive someone's civil rights from being held accountable.

Ending AIDS:

- **\$10 million allocated** to provide equitable access to housing, transportation, and nutrition assistance for income- eligible people living with HIV (PLWH) experiencing homelessness or housing instability in social service districts across the state, including HIV Enhanced Shelter Allowance (ESA) assistance in line with 110% of fair market rents, expand access to the 30% rent cap affordable housing protection to PLWH with disability or other extremely low income who live outside NYC; and transportation and nutrition allowances, and any additional rental costs determined based on limiting rent contributions to 30% of income.