



2022-2023 Budget 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.

Investments to Build an Infrastructure of Harm Reduction and Care to Address the Surging Overdose Crisis: *Despite record high overdose rates, the AIDS Institute's Office of Drug User Health has been flat-funded at \$35 million. In order to meet the needs and scale of this crisis, New York State must triple the budget of the Office of Drug User Health this year, which [provides invaluable services for New Yorkers](#).*

New York State can make investments to rapidly scale-up and build the harm reduction & care infrastructure through Two Phases:

Phase One: Immediate Interagency Transfer of Federal Block Grants

The OASAS Commissioner **must urgently transfer \$50 Million** from the Federal Substance Abuse Prevention & Treatment (SAPT) block grants to the AIDS Institute to rapidly scale-up harm reduction and drug user health services. This year, the state has already received \$194 million in SAPT federal block grants. ***However, OASAS has spent only \$40 million of SAPT grants, leaving \$150 million unspent.***

- In March 2021, the state received additional SAPT block grants of \$104 million on top of existing federal grants.
- In May 2021, an additional \$90 million was received.
- New York State can expect the next federal budget ***to deliver almost double the dollars*** of SAPT block grants, and these funds will be renewed for the foreseeable future

SAPT block grants guidelines ***do not prevent an interagency transfer***. Funds can be spent on harm reduction services regulated and funded by the AIDS Institute. The only stipulation is funding cannot be spent on the purchasing of syringes (because of the federal ban on syringe purchasing).

Phase Two: Allocated Funding from the Opioid Settlement and/or the Opioid Surcharge Tax in the Budget

New York has an abundance of funding to address the overdose crisis. In addition to the funding from the SAPT block grants, New York has secured \$1.5 billion from the Opioid Settlements, and an additional \$600 Million from the Opioid Surcharge Tax -- totalling \$2.1 billion.

Unlike the Opioid Settlement funds, revenue from the Opioid Surcharge Tax is not in a lock-box. **It is critical that Opioid Surcharge revenue must not be supplanted. All revenue must be supplemental funding to agencies.**

Investments to End Homelessness and Transition People From Shelters into Housing:

Pass and Allocate \$1 Billion to Fund the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) [S2804B/A9657B](#):

HAVP is a rental subsidy program modeled after the most successful programs of its kind across the country. If fully funded at \$1 billion, it could offer a pathway to permanent housing to every shelter resident, and prevent thousands of evictions across our state. Currently, it would be the only rental assistance program available to those who are undocumented, as well as those who have certain felony convictions.

Invest \$500 Million to 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.

Investments to Support People Living With HIV Across the State:

Allocate \$10 million in funding to the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance: This funding will be used 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.

Investments to Support the Mitigation of the Crisis of Mass Incarceration:

\$1 billion in funding to respond directly to incidents of gun violence through community-based interventions and services for victims and survivors. Unfortunately some have sought to exploit the current crisis of gun violence to further a mass incarceration agenda, rather than to advance meaningful, evidence-based solutions to improve community safety. Instead of responding with more people in jail, rollbacks to bail reform and the adoption of racist and inaccurate predictive “dangerousness standards” or so-called risk assessment tools, which would be both morally wrong and ineffective, we should be dedicating resources to proven solutions at an unprecedented level as well as identifying where additional acute needs exist and developing a plan to fill those needs, including through new programming where required. Community-based, non-police responses to incidents of gun violence – through community-based interventions and services for victims and survivors – are critical and proven components to reducing violence, but historically have not been funded at levels sufficient to meet the task at hand.

\$10 million dollars to fund right to counsel for post-conviction cases: New York ranks third in the country for the most wrongful convictions. Those are just the cases that we know about and likely represent just the tip of the iceberg. This is a reflection of on-going problems with our criminal legal system that we are trying to rectify with the passage of [A98/S266](#) - the Challenging Wrongful Convictions Act. While the bill is more generally a reform of CPL 440.10 there is an expected cost to cover the right to counsel. Currently New York is one of just five states in the US that does not provide a right to counsel for post-conviction cases, which contributes to the difficulties that wrongfully convicted people face when trying to have their convictions vacated.