



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Skoufis

Skoufis Announces \$96K Funding for Newburgh LGBTQ+ Center, Honors Volunteers & Partners with Senate Awards

[James Skoufis](#)

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Senator James Skoufis (D-Hudson Valley) announced that his office secured operational funding for the Newburgh LGBTQ+ Center in the state budget for a third consecutive year. The funding, totalling \$96,000 for fiscal year 2021-22, will enable the Center to continue expanding its operations and providing vital programs and services to the county's LGBTQ+ community. In all, Skoufis has secured \$296,000 over the past three years to support the Center's LGBTQ+ work in the community. Additionally, inspired by the Center's steadfast work to date, Senator Skoufis honored several of the Center's volunteers and partner organizations with Senate Commendations and Empire Awards on Thursday.

The Empire Business Award, the State Senate's highest commercial honor, is given to exceptional businesses that go out of their way to give back to their community. Skoufis presented two Empire Awards to organizations affiliated with the Newburgh LGBTQ+ Center: Newburgh Community Photo Project, a local non-profit which has provided immeasurable volunteer and in-kind support, and the Beacon-based Binnacle Books, which hosted some of the Center's early programming and continues to support their outreach efforts. He also awarded two Senate Commendation Awards on Thursday: to Kk Naimool, a dedicated Board member of the Center, and City of Newburgh native Phoenix Gayle, a longtime volunteer and organizer. Senate Commendations are one of the highest citizen honors that can be awarded, and are given to exceptional individuals who have shown dedication to, and made lasting contributions within, their community.

“The ongoing work of the Newburgh LGBTQ+ Center is truly inspiring, and I am honored to have secured this ongoing funding for them,” said Senator Skoufis.

“I thank Rae, Maria, and all of the community activists and partner organizations who continue to fight for a more just and equal Hudson Valley. Given the year and half the Center has had—raising funds to support the historically marginalized, stepping in to fill health care and housing voids left in the wake of COVID-19, continuing to educate and advocate in the face of personal and national tragedies—they deserve all the support their legislators can muster... and a well-earned vacation.”

"We are grateful for the belief of Senator James Skoufis in the work that the Newburgh LGBTQ+ Center does to address the needs of the most marginalized members of the LGBTQ+ community, including people of color, the formerly incarcerated, and low-income," said the Center's Executive Director/Lead Organizer Rae Leiner. "These funds are crucial to the operation of the Center, which employs queer people of color and systems-impacted people. We look forward to continuing our work to serve the needs of the vulnerable and the systems-impacted by providing cultural humility training, community and cultural organizing, leadership development, and community building opportunities. Thank you."

Centering the struggles and needs of Queer People of Color, the Newburgh LGBTQ+ Center organizes, advocates, and serves the needs of the LGBTQ+ community and our allies. More information can be found at www.newburghlgbtqcenter.org.

Senator Skoufis remains a committed ally and advocate for New York's LGBTQ+ community.

Commendation Recipient: Kk Naimool

Kk Naimool is a writer, activist, and educator living in the Hudson Valley. They are a member of the Board of the Newburgh LGBTQIA+ Center and co-founder of the Beacon Queer and Trans Liberation March. They are an avid advocate for equity and justice, predominantly in the area of racial justice, gender justice and LGBT equity. They currently serve in leadership roles in a number Queer AAPI collectives and racial justice collectives. Kk lives in Beacon where they currently serve on the city's Human Rights Commission.

Commendation Recipient: Phoenix Gayle

Phoenix Gayle is a Black trans womxn (inclusive variation of the word woman), born and raised, living, working, and organizing in the mid-Hudson Valley. She has organized to increase awareness regarding gun violence in the City of Newburgh, performed as a spoken word poet, and is a damn good make-up artist. She started organizing for the Newburgh LGBTQ+ Center in 2018 and has been a vital team member since.

Empire Recipient: Newburgh Community Photo Project

Newburgh Community Photo Project (NCP) is a grassroots, community-based arts program that teaches photography and related media to an underserved and underprivileged population in Newburgh, NY through workshops and mentorships. The goal is to explore critical social justice issues directly related to their lives and community and at the same time provide economic sustainability by imparting and developing important professional skills to the participants. Located at 102 S. William Street in the City of Newburgh, NY, NCP's mission is to train a diverse range of participants (with a focus on young adults) to acquire professional skills in photography and media through workshops, mentorships, and professional practices to increase economic sustainability and value in their work and themselves. More information is available [here](#).

Empire Recipient: Binnacle Books

Binnacle Books specializes in used and new literature, poetry, literary nonfiction, political history, art, drama, philosophy, graphic novels, and children's books. The bookstore is a collaborative endeavor by four partners, who have collectively been writers, editors, musicians, producers, organizers, teachers, filmmakers, and booksellers. More information is available [here](#).