



## THE NEW YORK STATE BLACK, PUERTO RICAN, HISPANIC AND ASIAN LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

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# CAUCUS PUSHES 2015 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PRIORITIES

*“Meeting the Needs of Minority Communities during this Budget Season”*

New York, NY – The New York State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus led by Chair Assemblyman Jeffrion Aubry, outlined the major priorities from their annual report “The People’s Priorities 2015”. Standing in support with them was **New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), Fiscal Policy Institute (FPI), Hunger Action, American Heart Association, YMCA**, and other labor unions, advocacy groups, and clergy. The Caucus formally announced their agenda which ensures that the budget and other pieces of legislation positively affect and provide equal access for low income and minority communities.

For many years the Caucus has been a key advocate in a wide range of criminal justice reforms. Toward that end the Caucus seeks to work with Speaker Heastie in reexamining how **police officers interact with minority and low income communities** through public hearings, and other forums that facilitate meaningful discussion around reform. The events leading up to the apprehension of Eric Garner, and killing of Mike Brown is indicative of a broader systemic problem; policing in minority communities.

While the Caucus agrees that there must be greater transparency within grand jury proceedings, transparency must be improved generally within the criminal justice system—it is necessary regarding the manner in which law enforcement police our streets and shootings involving police. The Caucus supports the governor’s plan to create an “Independent Monitor” position but will advocate for full transparency.

New York is the only state other than North Carolina that prosecutes ALL youth as adults when they've reached 16 years of age, it is time for New York State to raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction, "**Raise the Age**" legislation is a top priority of the Caucus. Studies show that youths who are incarcerated in the adult criminal justice system are more likely to suffer both physical and emotional abuse and have a higher rate of recidivism.<sup>1</sup> Other states that have recently increased the age of criminal responsibility have seen dramatic decreases in juvenile crime and lower recidivism rates.

Another top priority and long standing issue of grave concern to the Caucus is the **Campaign for Fiscal Equity** which organized itself in 1993 and sued the State of New York and won, on the grounds that the State was failing to provide students the "sound basic education" or "meaningful high school education". Since 2008, the State has not fulfilled this commitment. **The Caucus stands firm in urging the State to once and for all fulfill its commitment to CFE & Gap Elimination Adjustment funds.** Furthermore, the Caucus is disappointed that governor has linked increased school funding to other programs that would only deter money away from traditional public schools.

Moreover, the governor's failure to release school aid runs along with the executive budget proposal places a burden on school districts. The assembly's budget proposal provides \$830 million more than the governor's budget and represents the largest increase in school aid since 2008-09. The assembly's budget also removes the governor's requirement that increases in school aid be tied to other sweeping changes. In addition to the aforementioned top priorities the Caucus is also concerned with the following legislative issues:

DREAM Act

Raising the Age of Juvenile Jurisdiction

Solitary Confinement

Marijuana Decriminalization

Combating Poverty

Housing - Rent Regulation, Bank Settlements, and Public Housing Funding

Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (MWBE)

Farmworkers Rights

As the legislature moves forward in the budget process, the Caucus will continue to strongly advocate for the initiatives outlined in the Peoples Priority document that can be viewed online at <http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/BlackPR/20150305/index.pdf>.

**Caucus Chair Assemblyman Aubry (D- Queens)** said, "The time is ripe for the State's Legislators, advocates, and community leaders to come together and stand united in addressing the issues most prevalent in low income and struggling communities. Uplifting our people through our legislative initiatives and advancing their economic growth are one in the same and they will only be achieved through a collective effort. This is why as legislators; we must ensure that during this critical time of budget negotiations, our constituent's concerns remain at the fore. We cannot progress as a state nor embrace prosperity without addressing the lack of affordable housing, need for policing reform, inadequate education funding, and the poverty that plagues

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<sup>1</sup> [raisetheagency.com/get-the-facts](http://raisetheagency.com/get-the-facts)

many of our districts. I am confident that with this united front, our efforts will not be in vain and our robust agenda will be shepherded forward”.

“I look forward to continuing to work together to achieve Caucus priorities including raising the minimum wage, reforming our criminal justice system, passing raise the age legislation, improving and supporting public education, providing affordable housing, passing the DREAM Act, achieving women’s equality, and increasing funding for day care and family services to ensure that all of New York’s hard working families can thrive for generations to come”-

**Democratic Conference Leader Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D-Westchester).**

**Senator Jose Peralta (D-Queens)** said, “among the Peoples Priorities for this year, the state legislature should pass the DREAM Act. It is time we wake up our dreamers from their nightmare and provide them with college aid. We must level the field and help thousands of hard-working New Yorkers succeed in college.” Senator Peralta added, “Passing the DREAM Act is not just and fair, but it is also financially sound. In a few years, the allocation needed to make this bill a reality would pay for itself.”

**State Senator Bill Perkins (D-Manhattan)** stated, “I am very proud to steadfastly support the Peoples Priorities—a governing document that represents a comprehensive, progressive and empowering vision for all New Yorkers. I am heartened that it contains two fundamental criminal justice reforms: the videotaping of interrogations in all felony investigations (Senate Bill 2419) and HALT-ing solitary confinement (Senate Bill 2659). These two measures are foundation-stones in the essential fight to ensure just, equitable and humane outcomes in all facets of our public protection system.”

“Our state’s greatest, and most valuable resource is its vibrant and diverse people; and they are desperately in need of renewed investment. Throughout the state, hardworking men and women have long been burdened by stagnant wages and a lack of affordable housing. Generations of New Yorkers lack access to a quality education, and entire populations feel slighted by our criminal justice system. We must address these issues immediately. As legislators, as a Caucus, and as New Yorkers, we have a moral obligation to do so,” said **Senator Martin Malavé Dilan (D-Brooklyn).**

“In a commitment to produce real and tangible results for the people of New York, I will continue to fight for legislation that addresses the issues that matter most to our communities,” said **Assemblywoman Kimberly Jean-Pierre (D-Long Island).** “I stand with the Caucus in our effort to help families to not only succeed, but thrive, by raising the minimum wage, repealing the GEA to restore funding that our schools need, and fighting for women's equality.”

"Recent events throughout the country have cast a spot light onto the ongoing issue of race disparity in criminal procedure," said **Assemblyman Luis R. Sepulveda (D-Bronx).** "New York has been particularly affected by these events and has shown we must make changes in order to remedy these issues. The Caucus has done this with our People's Priority Budget, which includes raise the age, marijuana decriminalization, as well as improved police-community relationships. Much of this comes from an increase in transparency, particularly on grand-juries and in police shooting incidents. We as a Caucus have worked hard to see these changes made, and I look forward to seeing them acted upon in this year's budget."

“The People’s priority budget has incorporated the will and needs of the constituency represented by the Caucus. It is my fervent desire to improve the quality of life of those in need”  
**Assemblywoman Annette M. Robinson (D-Brooklyn).**

"Low and middle income New Yorkers are hurting from the combined effects of high property taxes, job loss, health care premium increases, and cuts in public services. While it is within the responsibilities of the New York State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus to protect services and resources for our most vulnerable New Yorkers, we understand full well the immediacy of the fiscal challenge facing our state and are committed to balancing a budget that is fair" - **Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson (D-Bronx/Westchester).**

“We set out an inclusive vision for New York. A vision that speaks to every New Yorker no matter their means, no matter their gender, no matter their life circumstances. A vision that says every New Yorker deserves a quality education from pre-K to adulthood. Every New Yorker deserves a living wage, affordable housing, and a humane justice system - no matter your national origin. While there is great deal of overlap between the vision set out here today and the one the governor has set out, I believe this People's Budget presents the extra steps our communities must take to represent the people”- **Senator Jesse Hamilton (D-Brooklyn).**

"The 'People's Priorities' have long been a progressive beacon, composed of legislation that would; expand equality, ensure a livable wage and increase access to affordable housing. With this year's priorities the Caucus continues a proud tradition of leading the way on issues that disproportionately impact minority communities throughout the State," said **State Senator Espaillat (D-Manhattan/Bronx).**

“I am excited that the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Caucus has put together such a comprehensive budget which truly takes into consideration the needs of the people of New York. This effort shows our commitment to ensuring that all communities in need have a strong advocacy voice” -**Assemblyman Roxanne Persaud (D-Queens).**

**State Senator James Sanders Jr.** said, “While all of the issues being highlighted today deserve our focus and attention, I would like to mention a few in particular that impact my district. CUNY and SUNY colleges deserve more funding. We need to be encouraging our young people to continue their education in order to compete in a global economy. I can remember a time when you could attend community college for free. Today, higher education comes along with a pile of student loan debt. Also, a return to community policing is necessary, but with the NYPD having 8,000 fewer officers than it did in the early 1990s, we have seen a shift to ‘drive-by policing’ with methods like stop and frisk, which has caused tension and resentment in minority communities. Finally, we need to raise the minimum wage. Too many New Yorkers are struggling to survive because they are not being paid a fair wage for an honest day’s work. We should reward those who aim to be independent providers for their family, not punish them with a pittance of a paycheck.”

“As a representative of parts of Crown Heights, Fort Greene, and Clinton Hill it is my job to voice the concerns of my constituents in legislative and budgetary matters. In our Peoples

Priority Budget we are asking for \$153 million for Affordable Housing with a combine package of different initiatives including \$27 million in capital repair funding for NYCHA to maintain and upgrade existing affordable housing in New York City and the State Low Income Tax Credit program to spur the creating of new affordable housing for future generations of New Yorkers to grow and raise their families in. Affordable housing is a fundamental human right which I will continue to fight for in Albany to ensure that the hard working men and women of my community can stay in the neighborhoods they worked so hard to create” -**Assemblyman Walter T. Mosley (D-Brooklyn)**.

"Recent events throughout the country have cast a spot light onto the ongoing issue of race disparity in criminal procedure," said **Assemblyman Luis R. Sepulveda (D-Bronx)**. "New York has been particularly affected by these events and has shown we must make changes in order to remedy these issues. The Caucus has done this with our People's Priority Budget, which includes raise the age, marijuana decriminalization, as well as improved police-community relationships. Much of this comes from an increase in transparency, particularly on grand-juries and in police shooting incidents. We as a Caucus have worked hard to see these changes made, and I look forward to seeing them acted upon in this year's budget."

“The People's Priorities are my priorities because the residents of my district depend on our leadership in Albany to ensure them access to quality housing, education, and social services. As a member of this caucus I am calling on my colleagues to stand firm to pass a budget that will restore the people's faith in Albany by restoring adequate funding to our schools and essential social service programs”-**Assemblywoman Maritza Davila (D-Brooklyn)**.

“Today, I joined fellow members of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Caucus in laying out a comprehensive agenda that addresses everything from education and worker's rights to criminal justice reform. This agenda is crafted to help tear down some of the barriers New Yorkers face and help build a more prosperous State for all our residents. I look forward to working with my colleagues in making these bold policy initiatives a reality” – **Senator Gustavo Rivera (D-Bronx)**.

“We must enact a budget that reflects the priorities of the people of New York,” said **Assemblyman Francisco Moya (D-Queens)**. “That means crafting a budget that raises the minimum wage, fully funds affordable housing, primary education, and the DREAM Act, and takes the needs of low- and middle-income New Yorkers into account. The people of New York understand that the DREAM Act is an investment in the future of our state. Including the DREAM Act in the budget will allow our policies to reflect our values.”

"The Assembly has taken great efforts to prioritize the needs of New Yorkers in its budget hearings and proposed revisions to the executive budget. I am proud to support several significant revisions that are aimed at benefiting tenants, our education system and local businesses. I intend to stand behind the Assembly's efforts to fight rent deregulation. I will strive to get the necessary funding for our public schools and restore cuts to EOP in CUNY and SUNY. And I will work with my colleagues to continue increasing the percentage of MWBE businesses that are competitive for state contracts, as well as raise the minimum while working toward a living wage." – **Assemblywoman Rodneyse Bichotte (D-Brooklyn)**.

New York faces a crisis in which of those who earn minimum wage are women, many of whom are the sole financial support of their family” said, **Assemblywoman Michaelle Solages (D-Long Island)** “We can no longer accept as status quo for women and working families to remain below or just above the poverty line despite being employed. The People’s Priorities of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus stand at the forefront of equality by advocating for policies like the Women’s Equality Agenda and the Paid Family Leave Act that will allow families and working women to not have to choose between whether to pay a bill or place food on their table.”

“We are told that there are two sure things in life - death and taxes. For the working poor who pay more than 16% of their income on a variety of fees, sales, state, local and property taxes, and for whom the cost of fundamental needs such as food, clothing, housing, transportation, child and health care far exceeds their income - those taxes represent the death of dreams - the death of hope.” Said, **Senator Kevin S. Parker (D-Brooklyn)** “The inequity of their tax rate of 16% against an 8% of income rate of taxation imposed on the wealthy - the 1% and corporate sector - condemns the working poor to a circle of poverty, with little or no hope of self-reliance for themselves or their families. Those who struggle to overcome the odds by working more and increasing earnings are rewarded for their struggle toward self sufficiency by a policy of income thresholds that reduces or totally eliminates subsidies or benefits such as Medicaid and Food Stamps which could propel them to an improved quality of life and an enhanced society.”

“New York has the greatest income inequality in the nation and we need a budget that faces this problem head on. The People's Budget outlines a number of policy initiatives that will help lift many families out of poverty and provide many 'shared opportunities' to move up the socioeconomic ladder. We applaud the Caucus for pulling together such a comprehensive agenda and look forward to working with them to advance it,” said **Ron Deutsch, Executive Director of the Fiscal Policy Institute.**

“Our communities can't continue to endure the effects of New York's first-in-inequality status,” said **Ivette Alfonso, President of Citizen Action of New York.** “But New York State can reverse the trend right now by investing in good schools and good jobs in the budget. Fully funding public schools and rejecting the hedge fund-led school privatization agenda will set New York's children on a path for success. And we must guarantee that every working family can earn a wage that allows them to meet basic needs.”

**Shelly Nortz, Deputy Executive Director for Policy with the Coalition for the Homeless** said, “The Coalition for the Homeless is so grateful to the Caucus for highlighting the problem of record homelessness, and underscoring the importance of cost-effective solutions including permanent supportive housing, long-term rental assistance, and greater access to New York City Housing Authority units for homeless individuals and families.”

“Kids and families can’t eat healthy if they don’t have healthy choices,” said **Julianne Hart, New York State Government Relations Director of the American Heart Association.** “The American Heart Association applauds the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Caucus for recognizing funding is needed for New York’s Healthy Food and Healthy

Communities Fund. This is a smart move that helps place grocery stores in New York's food deserts – communities where fruits, vegetables and other healthy fare are difficult to find.”

“The Task Force to End the AIDS Epidemic in New York by 2020, appointed by Governor Cuomo in October 2014, has created a Blue Print that clearly spells out the steps New York State needs to take to bring an end to AIDS as an Epidemic. The community calls on both houses of the Legislature and the Governor to do their part to see that the Blue Print is fully implemented. For over 30 years New York has been the epicenter of the AIDS epidemic, and we now have a chance to bring the epidemic to an end. We stand in solidarity with the Caucus on their progressive agenda and look forward to building a strong partnership as we work together to end AIDS in New York.” – **Charles King, President & CEO of Housing Works.**

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