



Fund Our Future

Who We Are

Fund Our Future is a coalition of union and community leaders committed to making the case for reshaping our government in our public interest. Although many of us have been champions of good government for decades, the COVID-19 pandemic brought new urgency to our efforts. Year after year, we - civil servants, citizens, and voters - experienced austerity-driven budget cuts and increasingly limited public services, while our taxes never seemed to change much for the better. Instead of building a government in the interest of We the People, powerful private interests lobbied to receive more and pay less than their fair share. While they've been freeloading off our tax-funded infrastructure, they've also been spreading lies about our government and our democracy to try to gain an even bigger share. Fund Our Future is fed up and ready to fight back for the future all New Yorkers deserve. We are fighting for our freedom to thrive.

Understanding Fund Our Future's Demands

Fund Our Future is a comprehensive campaign that incorporates local, state, and national demands centered on the belief that all New Yorkers deserve quality public services and modern infrastructure - from safe bridges and clean water to high-speed broadband and affordable childcare. From Buffalo to Bridgehampton, New Yorkers are uniting to demand that their government spend our taxes on ensuring a decent life for all of us, not just for the ones who can afford to buy a good life. All New Yorkers matter and we all deserve a chance to succeed. New Yorkers are scrappy and most of us can take care of ourselves, but even the richest New Yorker can't own what it takes to turn a crowd into a community. Fund Our Future is here to bring back the belief that our government is for us - that we shape our government to serve our needs, and that when everyday people come together, we can shape history. New Yorkers have been through a lot, and we have an opportunity now to come out of this pandemic stronger and more united than ever before. New Yorkers are ready to build a new society that puts people first. In a state with so much wealth and industry, poverty is a policy choice. We aim to refocus our legislature's priorities to invest in its people, because New Yorkers are our state's greatest natural resource. Every New Yorker deserves the freedom to thrive. Join Fund Our Future because we cannot afford to wait.



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Our Demands for New York State

Public Health

Fund Our Future believes that **every New Yorker deserves access to quality, affordable healthcare.** For decades, Americans have struggled with rising healthcare costs, which limits access to necessary treatments for our most economically insecure neighbors. The ongoing pandemic reminded us that the health of the individual and the health of the community are deeply interconnected. However, long before our current crisis, New York public hospitals have been underfunded and understaffed. Underinsured,

uninsured, undocumented, and low-income New Yorkers have faced barriers to healthcare for decades - leading our neighbors and family members to wait to seek treatment until they can no longer afford not to, and this delay leads to unnecessary suffering. **We have an obligation to our neighbors and loved ones to make sure that every New Yorker can get the healthcare they need, when they need it, no exceptions.**





The Crisis of Public Health Disinvestment

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the stark consequences of decades of austerity cuts. New York was the epicenter of the first wave of the pandemic in the US, and public hospitals quickly became overwhelmed with patients. Reports emerged that patients were lying in hallways due to bed shortages, and staffing shortages led to mandatory overtime for thousands of nurses who struggled to manage the steady flow of patients entering with acute symptoms. Pandemics are, by definition, catastrophes, but we were outraged by our federal representatives' slow response and the knowledge that for years prior to this public health emergency, our public hospitals already suffered from a critical staffing shortage and lack of supplies. SUNY Downstate's University Hospital (UH), a safety-net hospital that was nearly closed by austerity budgets in 2013, became

a COVID-only hospital during the pandemic. UH nurses and healthcare workers cared for thousands of critical patients on a shoestring staff with insufficient PPE, at great risk to their health and the health of their loved ones. **Patients suffer worst outcomes and higher mortality rates when hospitals are understaffed.** Nurses at public hospitals across the state have filed hundreds of reports to protest the hazardous conditions that arise when there are not enough staff to care for patients. These reports detail the impact of inadequate staffing on patients: missed medications or meals, delays in treatment and routine care. We must fight to ensure all New Yorkers receive quality, timely care. **Our public hospitals must be staffed to ensure quality care for each patient.**



Public Safety

New Yorkers look out for one another, and one thing we take very seriously is public safety. **Public safety is about making sure that we all feel secure,** and that any time we find ourselves in a dangerous situation, we can count on one quick call to dispatch the emergency help we need. In recent years, we've seen protests and calls for the way our society envisions public safety. The tragic deaths of civilians, particularly people of color, at the hands of police has sparked nationwide debates over police reform and how the criminal justice system can better serve the needs of our communities. We don't have all the answers, but we are committed to bringing community members, reformers, and professionals who work in the criminal justice system together to find the answers that work best for New Yorkers. We believe in a criminal justice system rooted in justice, centered on the needs of We the People, that does not discriminate based on race, identity, gender or for any other

reason. **Fund Our Future believes in expanding our emergency response system to ensure that mentally ill New Yorkers get appropriate healthcare services when they are most in need.** We believe that detention facilities must have adequate funding and proper staffing to guarantee the safety and well-being of inmates and staff. We believe that individuals on parole should receive adequate support to reenter society, with assistance finding good housing, employment, and counseling. We believe in limiting juvenile exposure to the criminal justice system, by providing early intervention for kids who experience trouble, linking them with individualized resources according to their specific needs. We are working with criminal justice reform advocates, law enforcement professionals, and other New Yorkers who have been impacted by the criminal justice system to fight for public safety in the interest of the public.



The Crisis of Disinvestment in Public Safety

We have witnessed the devastating effects of what can happen when our criminal justice system is limited by funding, by priorities, or by our imagination. When we respond the same way to every emergency, we miss the opportunity to reimagine a new approach to public safety. Not every public disturbance requires a police response, but if we want alternative approaches to public safety, we need to invest in building those systems. New Yorkers should have the option to call for emergency social workers or other non-police interventions in the event of an emergency. Too many New Yorkers in need of mental healthcare are languishing in prisons right now when they should be in hospitals instead. Many other New Yorkers are incarcerated for petty non-violent crimes due to lack of adequate resources. **A safer New York means investing in state**

mental healthcare facilities rather than for-profit detention centers. State facilities have been underfunded for decades, leading to poor conditions for incarcerated individuals and unsafe worksites for corrections staff. Massive outbreaks of COVID-19 in prisons highlighted the need to improve these facilities and limit the number of incarcerated individuals. When we don't invest smartly in public safety, all New Yorkers are at risk. We must take a holistic approach to community safety. We need to invest in public services that ensure educational, vocational, counseling, social work, psychological, and other clinical services are available for people experiencing mental illness, the developmentally disabled, the incarcerated, parolees and others. These services are key to making sure all New Yorkers can thrive.



Public Oversight of Publicly Funded Projects

We know taxes can be a touchy subject. We think that's because the cat is out of the bag about corporations and the super-rich dodging their fair share of taxes for years, while We the People keep footing the bill for the public resources that we all enjoy. **We pay taxes because we want to build a society where our families and our**

neighbors are safe, healthy, and have the freedom to thrive. Not only do we need to make sure that the ones who benefit the most pay their fair share of taxes, we also need to ensure that our tax dollars are being spent in a way that serves the interests of the people.



The Crisis of Privatization

We have a right to know where our money is going. We empower our representatives to direct the money we pay in taxes to build the society we want, so we have the right to make sure our money serves our interests. When legislators make deals with private partners on public projects, we must ensure that our investment is being guarded by public inspectors. Fund Our Future demands a public voice in all publicly funded projects, from the creation of social programs to the building of our physical infrastructure. We must have publicly accountable investigators to ensure all tax-funded projects benefit the community that paid for it and rely on it. We have seen what happens when public-private partnerships lack adequate public oversight; the incentive for private partners to maximize their returns on investment often leads to cutting corners, like using low-paid staff or cheaper building materials. Recently, concerns over the structural integrity of the Mario Cuomo Bridge came to light when a whistleblower alerted authorities to defective bolts used by the private

contractors hired to build the bridge. **Nearly 10% of New York's bridges are rated as structurally deficient, and much of the state's infrastructure is nearing obsolescence.** Although an investigation into the sudden, tragic collapse of a condominium building in Surfside, Florida, earlier this year is ongoing, reports have emerged that structural damages were known by the board for years prior to the building's collapse. Victims' families, survivors, and structural engineers are demanding that our government take a more active role in protecting us as private consumers. None of those victims deserved to lose their lives due to negligence, and if private interests will not voluntarily maintain the structures we rely on to keep us safe, then we must compel our government to represent our interests by introducing publicly-funded regulators to ensure that all of our infrastructure – public and private – is up to code.



Mental Health is for All New Yorkers

Mental health care is health care. Truly healthy communities support mental health through fairness, safety, justice, and support for those in need. If we want to build a hopeful society, we need to support those with the greatest needs. Diagnoses for mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, ADHD, and many others have been on the rise in past decades across America. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this trend, attacking not only the respiratory system of infected individuals, but also triggering a public mental health crisis. Isolation from loved ones, fear of the unknown, and

disruptions to our social lives exacerbated pre-existing tensions and led thousands of New Yorkers to seek mental health treatment for the first time. New Yorkers in need found a system overwhelmed by demand. **Our state's Office of Mental Health has lost over 13% of their staff since 2011 due to chronic budget cuts and the privatization of public services.** New Yorkers in need of in-patient psychiatric care have 5,000 fewer beds available to meet their need than they did a decade ago.



The Crisis of Cuts to Services for the Most Vulnerable

New York families suffer when we don't adequately fund mental health care facilities. One mother we spoke with told us that the wait list was three years long for her son to enter a long-term facility that would provide a proper level of care for his needs. Patients with the most severe needs often have the fewest residential treatment options available. Private facilities are not compelled to accept any patient, and many New Yorkers fall through the gap every year to devastating effect. Recent attacks on the New York City Subway system demonstrate the dangers of a society that leaves severely mentally ill people without the care they need. Incarceration is not the answer: New York City's jails have more patients with a mental health disorder than all the city's hospitals. We must create a new way forward for mental health care. We must create public community facilities, where all New Yorkers can receive the specialized care they need.

Steady budget cuts have led the NYS Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) to lose more than 3,100 beds in residential facilities for New Yorkers in need of full-time psychiatric care over the last decade. This leaves only 150 beds in two facilities across New York State for patients with the most severe needs, who may pose a risk to their families or themselves without proper around-the-clock care. Families caring for their sick relatives who can't get them into nursing homes or residential facilities are left to cobble together their own treatment plans - leading them to rely on 911 in times of crisis or quitting their jobs to provide full-time care. Families who fall through the safety net are exhausted, overwhelmed, and broke when they're left to figure it out on their own. We cannot afford to let the burden of care fall solely on our neighbors' shoulders. These are members of our community and we must provide community-funded and operated full-time facilities for all New Yorkers with unmet needs.



Growing the Civil Service

Every year since 2011, public agencies in New York State have faced staff reductions due to budget cuts. As of September 2021, there are approximately **5,000 unfilled positions** in New York state agencies, impacting untold numbers of New Yorkers who now have less access to services than they did a decade ago. A state budget is a statement of values. When our values as a community aren't reflected in that budget, our neighbors and our families suffer. Lack of staffing creates a crisis – in hospitals, nursing homes, residential homes, and detention centers, the lack of staffing can be dangerous or even fatal. We New Yorkers continue to have needs, and because of lack of public capacity, our state frequently contracts out to costly

private providers. **In FY2018-2019 alone, NYS spent more than \$610 million on private contracts.** We estimate that from 2016-2019, if NYS had used public employees rather than private contracts, the state could have saved \$265 million or more. Not only did the state waste money on these costly contracts, when state agencies can't provide as many services, New Yorkers often have to go out of pocket to pay private providers, and private providers have the right to turn down any client. We must make sure New Yorkers get the services they need by building a robust, permanent public service.



The Crisis of a Poorly Funded Government

Every single public employee we spoke with – in dozens of different agencies – described the same experience: they were **burnt out, overworked, and desperate for more staff**. Unemployment skyrocketed during the pandemic, and Department of Labor employees worked mandatory 12+ hour days every day with no days off for seven consecutive months to process the volume of claims they received. New Yorkers who suddenly found themselves without jobs during the lockdown couldn't afford to wait – our bills don't stop just because our employment status does. Newly unemployed New Yorkers likely didn't know that DOL staff in the state had lost over 21% of their staff in the decade preceding the pandemic. When our system is stretched to the breaking point, any new pressure could

lead to systemic failure, and we deserve better than that. We must build our civil service system to serve the people, and the state's current budget priorities don't let us do that. New Yorkers don't get the services they need and deserve when our public agencies are underfunded. **Every time a New Yorker has difficulty getting their basic needs met, it drains their focus and energy from being able to contribute what New Yorkers are world-renown for: our creativity, our innovation, our bravery, our pride, and our compassion.** Imagine what New York could look like if every single one of us had full security in our knowledge that when we need our community's help, our community has our back.



A Strong Social Safety Net

When we talk with fellow New Yorkers, the things they tell us that matter most to them are things that not even a Rockefeller or a Bezos could afford. **New Yorkers tell us they want clean, safe neighborhoods, good public schools, access to quality, affordable healthcare, public transportation options, safe roads, clean water, fresh air, green spaces, green energy and so much more.** They tell us their dreams of a better New York. They tell us why they came here or why they're raising kids here

and what they hope for the future. No matter where we came from or what our political views, all of us want our legacy to be that we chose to build a better life for our loved ones today and for the next generation to come. We can only build that future with each other. New Yorkers care for one another. **It's time to change our budget priorities and tax codes to reflect that.**



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New York State Public Employees Federation

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