



## 2026 Community Agenda

### 1) **Disrupt the School to Prison Pipeline**

New York State should pass the Solutions Not Suspensions Bill (S134/A118) to limit exclusionary school discipline. This policy change will help interrupt the pipeline from suspension to incarceration and move us toward more equitable schools. Each year, thousands of Buffalo's students are suspended from school, often for non-violent, developmentally appropriate behaviors. This criminalization of young people's conduct does not correct behavior, improve grades, or increase attendance, but it does lead to higher rates of juvenile justice involvement and incarceration. Students of color, students with disabilities, poor students, and English language learning students bear the brunt of these policies, perpetuating cycles of poverty and imprisonment. This bill will limit the causes and length of suspensions, promote restorative practices, and will include charter schools in its mandate. These policies have the potential to increase graduation rates, test scores, educational attainment, and the financial prospects of communities of color impacted by school suspensions.

**Lead Partners:** WNY Law Center, New York Civil Liberties Union, Peaceprints of WNY, Back to Basics Outreach Ministries/Buffalo Peacemakers

### 2) **NY4All: Prohibiting Collusion of State and Local Agencies with Federal Enforcement**

New York State should pass NY4All legislation (S2235A/A3506A) prohibiting any state officials or officers from enforcing federal immigration laws or cooperating with ICE. This will make immigrant communities safer and will ensure that all people will be treated equally under both state and local law. New Yorkers, regardless of their immigration status, should live freely and participate fully in their communities, without fear of detention or deportation. Current federal practices destabilize neighborhoods, separate families, and harm our economy. They prevent people from seeking resources and support services for themselves and their families, and they breed mistrust of public institutions—including schools, courts, and government. Further, they are making inequalities worse by employing illegal racial profiling and discrimination against non-English speakers. NY4All would prohibit state and local officers from funneling people into ICE custody and from sharing sensitive information with immigration authorities. This policy will make Buffalo-Niagara safer and more inclusive by affirming legal protections for all residents.

**Lead Partners:** New York Immigration Coalition, Jericho Road Community Health Center, New York Civil Liberties Union, Justice for Migrant Families, League of Women Voters, NY4All state-wide Coalition

**3) Establish a Municipal Office of Urban Agriculture and Food Policy in the City of Buffalo**

Buffalo should establish an Office of Urban Agriculture and Food Policy to enable Buffalo to develop food policy and strategies to address racialized food injustice. 45% of Erie County residents live below the poverty line, 1 out of 10 are considered food insecure, and these numbers are increasing. These problems are most acute on the East Side and in impoverished communities. Food has also been used to directly harm our communities. A Municipal Office of Urban Agriculture and Food Policy would develop policies and programs to make fresh, healthy, culturally relevant food more accessible and affordable; cut red tape impeding urban agriculture, community gardens, and community-owned food businesses; and enable residents to meet their food needs. This office should have a robust budget and staff and be guided by a community-grounded commission, including residents particularly affected by food injustice (e.g., low-income individuals and youth). The City Charter Review process is the best way to create this office.

**Lead Partners:** Good Food Buffalo Coalition, Greater Buffalo Urban Growers Network (GBUG), University at Buffalo's Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab, Buffalo Food Equity Network, 5 Loaves Farm, Buffalo Freedom Gardens, Buffalo Go Green, Fare Share WNY, Flat#12 Mushrooms, Grassroots Gardens WNY, Groundwork Market Garden, Kubed Root, Massachusetts Avenue Project (MAP), Gardens Buffalo Niagara

**4) Communities Not Cages: Pass Prison and Parole Reform in New York State**

New York State should pass the Marvin Mayfield Act, the Second Look Act, and the Earned Time Act. The Communities Not Cages bill package would reduce unnecessary prison terms, expand opportunities for resentencing, and allow people to return home when they have demonstrated growth. Buffalo–Niagara carries the burden of long-term incarceration: economic strain, fractured families, and neighborhoods drained of talent and potential. Black and brown residents in Erie County—and statewide—receive longer sentences, harsher outcomes, and fewer chances for release than their white counterparts. They also account for 75% of all state prisoners. Over 100,000 children in New York have a parent serving time, and as a result those youth are more likely to go to prison themselves. These bills will help make New York more just by overhauling outdated sentencing laws, including punitive mandatory minimums. These legislative reforms will bring needed dignity to prisoners and push back against the state's racially unjust prison systems.

**Lead Partners:** Center for Community Alternatives, Peaceprints, Osbourne, NY, Release Aging People in Prison, VOCAL New York, VOICE Buffalo

**5) Prioritize Community Health in the Humboldt Parkway/Kensington Expressway EIS Scoping Phase and Draft Review**

The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) should prioritize the health of neighboring communities as the primary objective for the Humboldt Parkway/Kensington Expressway Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS should be developed in collaboration with community stakeholders, and must explicitly center environmental justice, public health, and equitable outcomes for residents who have lived with the existing highway's adverse effects. The NYSDOT should study the highway's original impacts, perform robust health impact assessments, and engage in meaningful community engagement with Fruit Belt and East Side residents. The evaluation must also include full highway removal of the 198 to the river and the 33 from downtown to Fillmore with public transit options. Prioritizing health will improve air quality, reduce respiratory disease burdens, and advance racial equity— rather than cementing a legacy of environmental harm.

**Lead Partners:** East Side Parkways Coalition, Western New York Youth Climate Council, Citizens for Regional Transit, We Are Women Warriors

**6) Establish a Human Rights Commission for the City of Buffalo**

The City of Buffalo should establish an independent Human Rights Commission (HRC). The HRC would hear complaints and concerns of violations of such human rights as adequate housing, education, food and clean water, unionization, nondiscrimination, free speech and assembly, and protection from police misconduct and other arbitrary treatment. It would also monitor and report on human rights compliance and progress in Buffalo and receive and investigate complaints of human rights abuses. The HRC would hold regular public hearings, have subpoena power, make findings and recommendations, collect and publish data, issue annual reports, and conduct trainings. To ensure its effectiveness and independence, the HRC would be created by the City Charter, appoint its own members, and have a full staff, including investigators. By establishing a Human Rights Commission, Buffalo would give its residents an important tool for seeking justice, accountability, and change.

**Lead Partners:** Buffalo Human Rights Center, Our City Action Buffalo, Academy for Human Rights, Human Rights Initiative at the University at Buffalo Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences

## 7) **Enact an Ordinance in Buffalo Prohibiting Federal-Local Collusion in Civil Immigration Enforcement**

Buffalo should pass a law barring any City employees from enforcing federal immigration laws. This will protect migrants, save money and resources, and send a message that Buffalo is a welcoming, safe city. The US Supreme Court ruled decades ago that the federal government cannot use local jurisdictions to implement federal regulatory programs, including civil immigration laws. However, now the US government is attempting to coerce state and local governments to conduct their war on immigrants. Immigrant communities, particularly communities of color, are being targeted based on racial, linguistic, or ethnic characteristics. To protect our neighbors, the city of Buffalo should enact policy prohibiting the Buffalo Police Department and other city agencies from aiding the federal government in enforcing civil immigration laws. Our city can affirm the city's legal right to limit the federal government's ability to "commandeer" local resources for the enforcement of federal civil law, ensuring the equal treatment of all Buffalonians.

**Lead Partners:** National Lawyers' Guild, Buffalo Niagara; New York Immigration Coalition; Jericho Road Community Health Center; NY Civil Liberties Union; Justice for Migrant Families; League of Women Voters; Showing Up for Racial Justice; Greater East Side Field of Dreams Block Association

## 8) **We Want Care—Not Corruption—in New York State**

New York State should revoke its contract with the private equity corporation Public Partnerships LLC, which has undercut New Yorker's access to critical home health services. In 2024, the New York State Department of Health awarded an \$11 billion contract to Public Partnerships, LLC, making this private equity firm the contractor for the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program, which provides home care to Medicaid recipients. As a result, New Yorkers have lost health insurance benefits and 156,000 home care workers. We must restore choice and re-enable local organizations to manage this money. Finding a new provider will especially help communities of color who disproportionately depend on these benefits. We should also champion the Home Care Savings and Reinvestment Act, which could free \$1-3 billion to be reinvested into fair pay for all home care workers. This will improve medical care, benefit health care workers, and save lives.

**Lead Partners:** NY Caring Majority, Caring Majority Rising, UB Center for Disability Studies, UB Communities of Care, L'Arche Buffalo, Voice Buffalo-Niagara, Center for Self-Advocacy

## 9) **Pass the Youth Justice and Opportunities Act**

Western New York's state delegation, along with local officials, should support the Youth Justice and Opportunities Act (A5293/S4330). This act would replace punishment with prevention by expanding community-based alternatives that keep youth connected to school, work, and family. In Erie County, Black youth are five times more likely to be arrested than their white peers, and they're likelier to be tried as adults. The Youth Justice and Opportunities Act (YJOA) addresses this disparity by ensuring that developmental maturity—not bias—guides sentencing. The YJOA would end automatic prosecution of youth in adult court and expand access to diversion, education, and workforce opportunities. WNY delegates should support a statewide diversion and opportunity framework for ages 16–25, fund community-led pilots, and secure funding for restorative justice and reentry programs. This will position New York as a model for youth justice reform rooted in healing, safety, equity, and opportunity—not incarceration.

**Lead Partners:** VOICE Buffalo, Youth Represent, Millennial Hijrah, WNY Reentry Coalition

## 10) **Create a Department of Arts and Culture within the City of Buffalo**

The City of Buffalo should establish a Department of Arts and Culture. This will affirm and expand Buffalo's commitment to arts. The department can prioritize culturally specific programming to ensure that historically underfunded communities have access to sustained resources. Creating this department would formalize city support, ensure a clear and equitable process for insuring and distributing funding, and advance strategic arts policy citywide. While nearly half of Buffalo's population identifies as non-white, city arts support has historically favored larger, older institutions. This department would distribute resources fairly to institutions serving communities of color and employing diverse staff. It would incorporate the existing Buffalo Arts Commission, consolidating current programs—such as public art administration, and managing city-owned cultural facilities—into a cohesive structure. Creating this department would address the longstanding lack of a structured funding process, provide administrative capacity, and position Buffalo to better support all of our arts and cultural institutions.

**Lead Partners:** Arts Services Inc. of Western New York, members of Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance, members of Frontline Arts Buffalo

**11) Pass Good Cause Eviction Protections and Keep Housing Affordable in Buffalo**

The Buffalo Common Council should opt in to the strongest version of Good Cause Eviction protections under New York State law. Good Cause limits evictions to specific grounds for removal (e.g. nonpayment of rent, breaking the lease). It also caps annual rent increases at 5-10%. This allows landlords to keep up with increased costs while preventing them from forcing tenants out with unwarranted rent hikes. Good Cause will help tenants stop unfair evictions, and it will create a more stable, equitable rental market in Buffalo. Good Cause also increases housing security while decreasing the rent burden in communities of color, which are disproportionately affected by evictions. Opting in to this state law will reduce homelessness, improve health outcomes, and strengthen neighborhoods in Buffalo.

**Lead Partners:** People United for Sustainable Housing, Buffalo DSA, Housing Opportunities Made Equal, Our City Action Buffalo/Our City Buffalo, Buffalo Housing Justice Coalition