

PUBLIC GOOD

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Standing with Partners. Advancing Policy. Strengthening Buffalo.

Buffalo Residents Sharpen Skills at First Annual PPG Advocacy Summit



Regine Ndanga, PPG's Civic Education and Partnership Manager, teaches the "Burnout and Compassion Fatigue" workshop at the Advocacy Summit.

Kricky Ksaizek

Americans in primary school learn shockingly little about our local governments. We spend years learning about our federal government—that it's made up of three branches, the extent of their powers, their history, and much more. But we learn almost nothing about our local government. What's the difference between city and county government? What do they do? Who are our representatives, and how do we reach them? And, if a representative doesn't listen to our concerns and make a change, what do we do next?

Without this knowledge, Buffalonians may not know how to enact the systems change that would improve our neighborhoods and city.

Since PPG's founding, we've shared this information with our local partner groups as part of the community agenda process. These collaborations have led to many policy wins over the years. But historically, we haven't focused on public-facing education about local government.

This year, we decided to take that step. On Saturday, April 26, we hosted our first annual Advocacy in Action Summit. The summit brought together over 100 attendees eager to learn civic engagement, advocacy, and public policy skills.

The day centered around the "Winning Change in Buffalo" panel session. Seasoned advocates India Walton, Maxwell Bollman, and Shontay Barnes shared their journeys to successful campaigns and offered insights on building power for the public good.

Throughout the day, we held workshops about advocacy skills featuring local experts and partners. Our "Working with the Media" session braided PPG's media training with expert

advice from Investigative Post journalists I'Jaz Jaciel and Geoff Kelly. "Meeting with Legislators" covered everything from scheduling meetings with elected officials to building long-term relationships with them. It also included insights from Housing Justice Organizer Janayia Capers of PUSH Buffalo.

Other sessions focused on the practical aspects of advocacy at different levels of government. "City and County Advocacy" outlined the various powers and responsibilities of the City of Buffalo versus Erie County. This was meant to help participants identify which leaders and departments can best address their particular concerns.

Recognizing the emotional and social dimensions of advocacy, PPG also hosted two powerful wellness-focused workshops. "Trauma-Informed Advocacy" highlighted the importance of creating advocacy spaces rooted in safety, trust, empowerment, and cultural humility—ensuring that those with lived experience are central to decision-making. Meanwhile, "Burnout and Compassion Fatigue" provided a supportive environment for participants to process challenges, share coping strategies, and build resilience as they navigate the demanding work of social change.

By day's end, attendees left with new skills, stronger connections, and a deeper understanding of how to turn advocacy into action across Buffalo and beyond.

The second annual Advocacy in Action Summit will take place on Saturday, April 25, 2026, at Hayes Hall, University at Buffalo South Campus. Building on last year's momentum, the upcoming 2026 summit will introduce new training opportunities along with intermediate and advanced sessions for returning advocates seeking to deepen their impact.

"By day's end, attendees left with new skills, stronger connections, and a deeper understanding of how to turn advocacy into action across Buffalo and beyond."



Left to right: Jenni Thurston, Keelen Erhard, and Sharon Ivey welcome participants to the summit.

Kricky Ksaizek

Partners Stand Up as Federal Government Cuts Critical Services

Deep federal budget cuts enacted by the Trump Administration and Congress in 2025 have hit Western New York hard. In a survey we sent out to partners, 40 organizations reported losing a whopping \$36.5 million collectively as of June. These losses, they said, resulted in layoffs, furloughs, and reductions or cancellations of vital community programs.

PPG's mission has always centered around local policy change—not federal. Yet, as we began to hear about these cuts to critical services across Western New York, we knew that we needed to do something. The first step was creating and sending out this survey, collecting responses, and sharing them with our state and federal elected officials. By tapping into our broad partner network, we could convey critical information about local impacts to government decision makers.

Next, we began interviewing affected organizations. Shontay Barnes—our Visiting Advocacy Fellow at that time—heard stories about the important work that partners were doing: providing services for folks facing homelessness, training the next cohort of local teachers to enter the workforce, promoting civic engagement, and much more. Without the necessary federal funds, programs like these must be cut back or ended. Many partners shared that they are trying to access local and state funding to help make up for lost federal funds.

Simultaneously, we began recording videos with impacted partners. Providence Farm Collective provides local farmland for folks who may not otherwise be able to access it. The group talked to us about their frozen federal funding and the lawsuit they have joined in an attempt to get the decision reversed. Healthcare education workers from 1199 SEIU spoke about the massive increase in insurance premiums many Western New Yorkers will face due to cuts. By sharing stories like these with the public, we can make the federal cuts more tangible for local residents.

To get the word out, we hosted a community forum to discuss these impacts. Speakers from the Healthcare Education Project and Providence Farm Collective joined us, and we shared data on the financial impacts to our community. For example, federal Medicaid cuts will result in a \$3 billion loss for Erie County. This loss will likely lead to rural healthcare facility closures and diminished quality of care at the remaining facilities as they are inundated with more patients. Similarly, federal cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps) will result in a \$90 million loss for Erie County. Decreased food stamp funding will lead to more hungry families and children.

The actions of the Trump Administration and Congress are putting Western New Yorkers' lives at great risk. Yet, while examining the local impacts, we also saw resilience and solidarity among our partners as they pushed back against these cuts. All Americans deserve to have their basic needs met and to live with dignity. We must stand beside our impacted partners and residents to ensure that all our neighbors can live safely and securely.

Special thanks to our funders who made this work possible:

THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR GREATER BUFFALO

THE JOHN R. OISHEI FOUNDATION

THE ROWBOAT FAMILY FOUNDATION

PPG Proposes Policies for Buffalo's Next Chapter

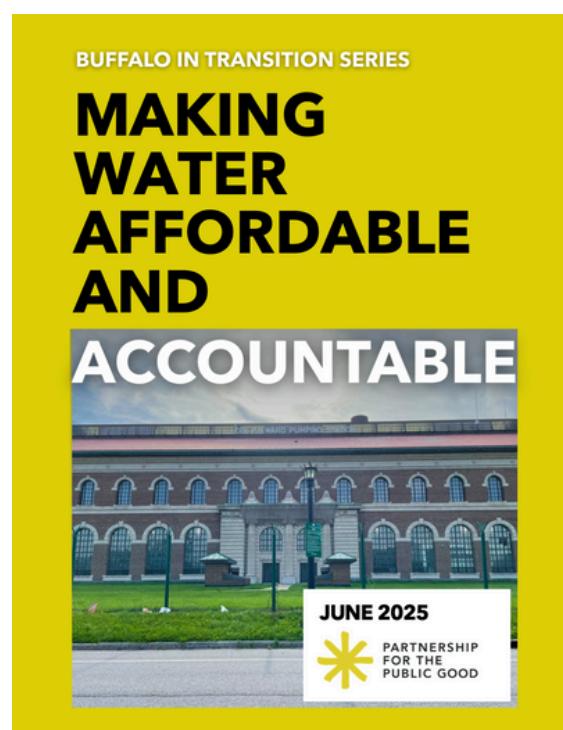
This spring, PPG released "Buffalo in Transition," a new series of policy briefs outlining community-driven ideas for Buffalo's next chapter. Rooted in PPG's community agenda and input from more than 380 local partners, the series presents practical strategies to reduce poverty, advance racial equity, strengthen democracy, and build a city where every resident can thrive.



Nearly one in four Buffalo homeowners earns under \$35,000 a year. Many struggle with repairs, taxes, and fees that threaten housing stability. This brief recommends expanding tax exemptions, reinstating payment plans, and creating a coordinated home repair network. Together, these changes would help residents preserve equity, prevent foreclosure, and maintain safe, stable housing.



Over 80% of Buffalo's 911 calls are unrelated to crime. This brief proposes creating Community Safety Departments (CSDs)—teams of trained professionals who respond to nonviolent calls. CSDs would free up police to focus on crime while improving outcomes for residents in crisis through compassionate, health-based responses.



Thousands of Buffalo homes face water shutoffs each year—often for small debts. This brief urges the City of Buffalo to restore public control, create income-based rates, and ban shutoffs for essential use. Treating water as a public good ensures affordable access for all residents and increases transparency.



Buffalo has over 15,000 vacant lots—nearly half of them city-owned—offering opportunities for renewal. This brief proposes turning empty parcels into assets like green affordable housing, community gardens, and shared public spaces. Strategic land use can reduce blight, promote sustainability, and strengthen neighborhoods through community-driven revitalization.



Buffalo's government must rebuild transparency and accountability to restore public confidence. This brief urges the City of Buffalo to enforce transparency laws, prevent conflicts of interest, and empower oversight boards. By opening decision-making and strengthening public participation, City Hall can foster fairness, integrity, and renewed civic trust.



Immigrants and refugees strengthen Buffalo's economy and culture, but they face major barriers to accessing services in the City of Buffalo. This brief calls for a language access law and renewed investment in the Office of New Americans. It also asks that the City of Buffalo pursue Certified Welcoming status.



Half of Buffalo renters can't afford their homes, and many face unsafe conditions from aging housing and lead paint. This brief calls for Good Cause Eviction protections, full implementation of the Proactive Rental Inspection Program, and a vacancy study to expand rent stabilization. These changes would move us toward a city where all residents have safe, affordable homes.



Buffalo's arts funding has plummeted from over \$1 million annually to just \$6,500 in 2021–2022. This brief calls for restoring steady, equitable arts investment to sustain creative organizations. These critical organizations build community, strengthen civic identity, and drive economic and social vitality.



Read the briefs on our website, ppgbuffalo.org.

Advocates Celebrate Major Win: Reducing Suspensions for Young Children

PPG's suspension coalition celebrated a major win this fall: the Board of Education voted to amend its suspension policies. These changes have the potential to significantly reduce what's called "exclusionary discipline," or punishments that remove youth from classrooms.

For years, advocates have argued that Buffalo's suspension rate—the highest in the state—has crushing effects on young people and on the community as a whole. "Forcing students out of classrooms... damages their mental health," said coalition member Quinn Martha, and "increases the chances they'll fall behind, be chronically absent, drop out, or interact with police."

In discipline, stark racial disparities are coupled with even more grim imbalances between well-off and poor students, and native English speakers and English learners. Students who are disabled and those who participate in special education programs are also disproportionately more likely to be sent home. The sheer numbers are a sign that the system is not working; Buffalo Public Schools have been suspending around 7,000 students a year. This includes hundreds of pre-kindergarten to 3rd grade students.

However, the Board recently rewrote the rules, making it much more difficult to suspend our youngest kids. They also changed the suspension categories to avoid language that "lets bias creep in," as coalition member Sam White says.

The new policies reinforce district rules about using progressive interventions, including restorative justice practices. These new policies came out of work our coalition members did alongside teachers and administrators, parents and students, as well as board members and advocates.

Though the impact remains to be seen, coalition members hope these changes will bring about some needed redirection. "It is my hope that this is only the beginning," said school board member Cindi McEachon, and we agree.

Readers can follow along at the district's own Data Dashboard to see how our schools are implementing these changes: <https://bit.ly/BPSSuspensionsData>.

"Forcing students out of classrooms... damages their mental health."

QUINN MARTHA
SUSPENSION COALITION MEMBER



Stills from video by Jamil Crews

Left to right: Quinn Martha, Judith Gerber, Samantha White break down the impact of school suspensions on *The Public Good*, PPG's weekly podcast.



Visit the BPS Data Dashboard

Community Responder Pilot Coming Soon

Buffalo is now mere steps away from having a community responder pilot program. A community responder program could handle low-level behavioral health and other non-emergency situations instead of the police. Community response teams are usually made up of health professionals and trained peers who can provide person-centered care—like wellness checks, emotional support, de-escalation, and more.

PPG and the Community Responder Coalition made great progress this year toward establishing the pilot. The group did this largely by increasing community engagement in the intended pilot zip code—14208. The coalition held four listening sessions and one youth focus group, spoke to several block clubs in the area, and—with the help of UB medical students—knocked on nearly 400 doors. All of this resulted in over 200 in-person conversations with residents in the zip code. The coalition was thrilled to see that 100% of residents expressed either support or neutrality to the idea of community responders being piloted in their neighborhood.

"...100% of residents expressed either support or neutrality to the idea of community responders being piloted in their neighborhood."

The coalition also made significant progress in laying the administrative and logistical foundation for a successful pilot. Ian Lechevet, a PPG intern and experienced EMT, researched and published a policy brief outlining the legal parameters of operating a community responder pilot in New York State. Buffalo Center for Health Equity became the fiscal sponsor of the pilot. Finally, the pilot began the hiring process for its first full-time staff member, a Community Responder Pilot Coordinator. Funding for this position is secure for two years, and interviews are underway.

In 2026, the coalition will focus on achieving full pilot funding, beginning to train community members in community responder skills, and continuing outreach in the pilot neighborhood. Sign up to receive email updates at our new website, buffaloresponders.com.



Visit Buffalo Responders website



Read the latest Community Response Program policy brief

East Side Parkways Coalition Wins Redo of Kensington Project

The Eastside Parkways (ESP) Coalition achieved an important first step in their fight for full restoration of the Humboldt Parkway. After years of advocacy, a January court ruling has forced the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) to reevaluate its \$1.5 billion Kensington Expressway tunnel and parkway cap project, a project widely viewed as compromised and ill-conceived.

The change comes after a successful lawsuit, which was filed by the ESP Coalition and residents who live near the Kensington Expressway. The judge ruled that the State didn't do its due diligence when planning the project. The State skipped the necessary environmental impact study and failed to assess the true risk to Humboldt Parkway residents.

As a result, the NYSDOT announced it would start over in September 2025.

The work to fully restore Humboldt Parkway continues as the ESP Coalition awaits the start of the new process. The Coalition demands that the State fully include community voice in the project's new objectives. They also request that Coalition members and local university volunteers—not just state officials—be involved in the environmental and traffic research process.

Buffalo Residents Have a Rare Chance to Rewrite City Charter

For the first time in more than a quarter of a century, Buffalo residents have an opportunity to review and change our city's charter. The Buffalo City Charter establishes the basic structure of Buffalo's municipal government—from the powers of the mayor and common council to the City budget process and tax collection. It provides the framework for the operation of the City's many departments, boards, and commissions.

Thirteen residents have been appointed to the Buffalo Charter Revision Commission and are volunteering to lead a top-to-bottom review of the Charter. PPG's very own Anna Falicov, Senior Policy Fellow, was appointed to the Commission and elected chair. The Charter Revision Commission will identify what works with our charter, what is outdated (many provisions date back more than 100 years), what should be changed, and most importantly, how our government structure can improve quality of life for residents. The Commission's recommendations will be submitted to a public vote at the general election on November 3, 2026.

This type of review has not taken place since 1999, and during those years, much has changed in the City of Buffalo. Does our charter meet the needs of our residents? Does it encourage not only development, but the kinds of development that will best serve our entire city? Do our different elected officials and departments work cooperatively and effectively? The Commission's charge is to perform a comprehensive review with significant public input to answer those questions.

The Charter revision process cannot, by itself, solve Buffalo's many challenges, including the City's fiscal crisis, high poverty rates, and widespread housing needs. As a citizen-driven commission, however, it can take a fresh look at the way City Hall works—with energy, commitment and an openness to new ideas. PPG will partner with Our City and other community-based organizations to host workshops and webinars designed to educate and equip residents to participate in the process.

Stay tuned for more on charter revision by following us on social media or subscribing to our newsletter.



Community members offer comments to the Buffalo Charter Revision Commission at a November 2025 meeting.

PPG to Say Goodbye to Longtime Team Member and Powerful Advocate

PPG staff are sad to lose an impassioned, sharp, and savvy co-worker in Colleen Kristich, Senior Community Researcher. Colleen came to PPG as an intern in 2017 through a Master of Social Work program. Her court arraignment observation laid the foundation for "Cruelty and Cost: Money Bail in Buffalo." She soon followed with work on language access, police disinvestment, jail policy, and, most recently, bringing community responder teams to Erie County. In all her writing and coalition work, Colleen has shown the power of combined grace and rigor. This is what accountability and love look like.

Colleen has spent years building connections in activist communities, which shines through in her commitment to listening to community. Her generosity with time and insight has made her invaluable to her colleagues and to the many powerful coalitions she's worked with. Colleen will leave PPG at the end of January.



PPG Staff Welcomes Experienced New Addition

PPG is thrilled to announce Shontay Barnes is joining the team as our Advocacy and Impact Manager. Shontay began her work with PPG as a Visiting Advocacy Fellow, helping us address the devastating budget cuts from the Trump Administration. She started by interviewing partner groups that had been directly affected by federal funding cuts. Then, she developed materials to educate the public and elected officials on how federal actions were impacting our region.

In October 2025, Shontay transitioned to a full-time role with PPG, focusing on policing, internal systems, and fee-for-service work. She arrives at PPG with a wealth of experience in organizing—both people and organizations—and her background as a program evaluator will help us strengthen our internal processes and develop our strategy as we near twenty years in operation.



A Hive of Civic Action: Creating a New Home for Partnership for the Public Good

Campaign for 1464 Main Street



A Historic Home

PPG is moving two miles north to 1464 Main Street. This historic two-story storefront building was the headquarters to the Flexlume neon sign company since 1946. Today, it is home to the dynamic FITZ Books on the storefront level—and will soon be home to PPG on the second story.

A Central Hub

Centrally located on Main Street between Ferry and Utica, our new location is accessible to everyone. Conveniently located near the subway and two critical bus lines and with quick access to major car routes, our exciting co-location with FITZ Books creates a new hub of cultural and civic activity.

A Shared Commons

In addition to PPG's activities, dozens of grassroots community groups, small nonprofits, and service agencies use our space for their own important needs: board meetings, trainings, retreats, and more. This campaign will help us create a new vibrant commons for partners to share.

We are seeking investment for a new community hub.

To create our new home at 1464 Main Street, we will:

- Update and reconfigure office space.
- Transform a 1,600 square foot adjacent warehouse space into a community education center.
- Make our second floor location fully ADA accessible.

We are seeking funds from public grants, foundations, and individual donors to make this vision a reality. Your investment will help us build a shared center where we will promote grassroots learning, advance democratic action, and build a better Buffalo Niagara.



To make a gift, follow this QR code or make a check payable to Partnership for the Public Good and mail it to 1464 Main Street, Buffalo NY 14209. To continue discussing our capital project, please reach out to Keelan Erhard, Director of Finance and Operations, keelan@ppgbuffalo.org.

2026 COMMUNITY AGENDA ROLLOUT

This year's top ten ways to make Buffalo more just, sustainable, and culturally vibrant.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 16, 10AM

Alumni & Visitor Center | Buffalo State University
667 Grant St.
Buffalo, NY 14213

