



## 2019 State Legislative Agenda Promoting Strength, Protecting Justice



**COMMUNITIES FIRST:** After the financial crisis hit, thousands of homeowners faced foreclosure and New York responded by constructing a network of protections and supports aimed at saving homes and preventing homelessness and neighborhood deterioration. Now, funding for homeowner services is running out – 2/3 of all services will run out of funding in March 2019. New York home owners and communities need a [new program](#) to combat neighborhood deterioration, save homes, and prevent homelessness.

**ASK:** Provide \$20 million for an innovative program, Communities First, which will take a holistic, regional approach in preventing foreclosures and zombie properties and will stabilize communities across the state.



**COMMUNITY HEALTH ADVOCATES (CHA):** Challenges to the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and fear of changes to public health programs at the federal level have brought confusion and uncertainty as New Yorkers sort through the complexities of health insurance coverage. Since 2010 [CHA](#) has helped 337,000 New Yorkers navigate those challenges, get the treatment they need, and get it covered by insurance.

**ASK:** Fund CHA at a total of \$8 million.



**IMMIGRANT RIGHTS:** In the face of attacks against immigrants from the federal level, the [Liberty Defense Project](#) was created to uphold the rights of immigrant New Yorkers, providing legal representation to those most at risk. In order to keep families together, businesses booming, and communities whole, this project must not only continue but expand to areas where legal resources have been scant or absent.

**ASK:** Fund the Liberty Defense Project at a total of \$20 million.



**CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES:** Equal access to justice is a core value that New Yorkers share. [Civil legal services are essential](#) to ensuring that low income New Yorkers can access justice regarding the necessities of everyday life – housing, safety, public benefits, and civil rights.

**ASK:** Expand and stabilize the delivery of quality civil legal assistance by supporting:

- The Office of Court Administration proposed funding for civil legal services.
- Maintaining Legislative Funding for civil legal services and legal assistance for DV victims from the Legal Services Assistance Fund.



**DISABILITY ADVOCACY PROGRAM (DAP):** New Yorkers who are disabled and low income need stable income to help to manage disabilities. The [Disability Advocacy Program \(DAP\)](#) helps provide that stabilized income by assisting in accessing federal disability benefits. As a bonus, New York's state and local governments benefit from the more than \$1 billion in federal dollars leveraged over the history of the program.

**ASK: Fund DAP at a total of \$11.26M.**



**DISABILITY BENEFITS:** The SSP State Supplement Program (SSP) provides a New York supplement to federal SSI and SSD benefits. Since New York's takeover of the SSP in 2014 disabled and elderly New Yorkers have encountered problems navigating the complex process and there has been no cost of living increase for the state program, while both SSI and SSD have annual cost of living adjustments.

**ASK: Provide an increase in the SSP amount for disabled New Yorkers, and provide funding to enable not-for-profit organizations to assist people with the complex SSP process.**



**CHILD CARE:** For working families, [affordable child care is indispensable](#). Low income working parents often require financial assistance to meet the cost, which for many families is more expensive than rent.

**ASK: Empire Justice Center supports the Empire State Campaign for Child Care's budget request, including investment of \$51 million to restore the investment in child care subsidies to 2016 levels accounting for inflation, \$26 million to cap child care co-payments at an affordable level, and reinstating the 75% market rate percentage and assist providers who must comply with increased minimum wage increases.**



**HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION:** The number of homeless individuals and families in New York State continues to break records and the rent portion of public assistance bears no relationship to the soaring cost of housing. [Home Stability Support](#) will create a statewide rent supplement program to bridge the gap between the existing shelter allowance and 85% of the fair market rent for those facing homelessness, experiencing domestic violence, or living in hazardous housing conditions, as well as provide a heating differential for those whose heat is not included in the rent.

**ASK: Provide funding and authorization for HSS in the State Budget.**



**TRANSGENDER RIGHTS:** This year is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stonewall, an event that began decades of LGBTQ activism and advocacy with New York seen as a worldwide leader. When it comes to transgender rights, however, New York has lagged behind many other states. This year, as attacks on the transgender community at the federal level continue at an unprecedented rate, New York must stand up as a leader once more and pass the [Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act \(GENDA\)](#) and codify protections for transgender and gender non-conforming New Yorkers.

**ASK: Pass the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act (GENDA).**



**STUDENT LENDING AND HIGHER EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY:** The Trump administration has dismantled federal protections for students to keep them from being taken advantage of by high-cost, low-quality higher education programs. New York has been a leader in higher education through its free tuition program and must now step in to [protect the state's students and taxpayers](#) from being taken advantage of by institutions in the higher education sector.

**ASK:** Enact protections including a state-based gainful employment rule, protections for veterans from predatory recruitment, enhanced aid to defrauded borrowers, preserving students' legal rights, and banning untrustworthy accreditors.

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*Empire Justice Center is a statewide, multi-issue, multi-strategy, public interest law firm focused on changing the "systems" within which poor and low-income families live. Empire Justice protects and strengthens the legal rights of people in New York State who are poor, disabled or disenfranchised through: systems change advocacy, training and support to other advocates and organizations, and high quality direct civil legal representation. Empire Justice has offices in Albany, Rochester, Yonkers, White Plains and Central Islip on Long Island.*



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