



Empire Justice Center 2018 State Policy Priorities Promoting Strength, Protecting Justice

As New Yorkers, we unite around the concepts of liberty, equality and opportunity. Now we face the most significant shift in policy perspective at the federal level that's been seen in a generation, but opportunities for New York to uphold our shared values are everywhere. In 2018, Empire Justice Center's top priorities will be focused on identifying and fostering ways to strengthen New York's laws, our communities, and each other, to protect justice for ALL New Yorkers.

FUNDING PRIORITIES



COMMUNITY HEALTH ADVOCATES (CHA): Sorting through the complexities of health insurance coverage and figuring out how to access needed health care is often daunting. [Since 2010 CHA has helped regular New Yorkers navigate those challenges](#), get the treatment they need, and get it covered. With shifting health care priorities at the federal level, CHA is needed NOW more than ever.

ASK: Fund CHA at a total of \$4.75M.



IMMIGRANT RIGHTS: New York was built by immigrants. Our diverse culture, vibrant communities, and economy thrive thanks to immigrant families. The dismantling of protections at the federal level is an attack on fellow New Yorkers and it continues to tear families apart, separating friends and coworkers, and destabilizing entire communities. Our state must maintain its investment in legal services for immigrants, helping to uphold their basic civil and human rights as they face persecution from the federal government.

ASK: Continue funding for legal assistance through the [Office for New Americans](#) at least \$14.6M.



DISABILITY ADVOCACY PROGRAM (DAP): Disabled New Yorkers who are low income are better able to manage their disabilities when their income is stable. [DAP helps low income people access federal disability benefits](#), providing a measure of financial stability. 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 \$9.26M.



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 have that access with 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.**



CHILD CARE: For working families, [affordable child care is indispensable](#). Low income working parents require financial assistance to meet the cost, which can be more expensive than rent for many families. Still, only 17% of eligible children receive child care subsidies as New York has reduced the number of children served in order to try and cover rising costs and that was before a \$7M funding cut was implemented.

ASK: Invest \$100 million to restore the investment in child care subsidies to 2016 levels, account for inflation, restore last year’s \$7 million cut, reinstate the 75% market rate percentage and assist providers who must comply with increased minimum wage increases.



HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION: Homelessness is an epidemic in New York State, causing harm to families, undermining children’s success in school, and costing taxpayers far more than it would to just invest in keeping those on public assistance in their homes. [Home Stability Support \(HSS\)](#) would create a statewide housing 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. Importantly, it would also 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.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



WAGE JUSTICE: \$1 billion of wage theft occurs every year in New York State, pushing more than 25,000 families under the poverty line and leaving honest businesses without tools to combat unfair competition. Loopholes in State law give bad faith employers the opportunity to engage in wage theft without facing consequences – allowing them to transfer assets so that even if a court decides against them, they can continue their business under a new name, hide property and assets, and avoid paying what they owe to employees and the State. [Securing Wages Earned Against Theft \(SWEAT\)](#) will create tools that are needed to ensure accountability when wage theft occurs, giving employees and the State a better chance to collect the money they are owed while removing unfair competition for law-abiding businesses.

SOLUTION: Pass SWEAT A.628 (Rosenthal)/S.579 (Peralta)



REVERSE MORTGAGES: Reverse mortgages have become an emerging trend in home refinancing, [but they come with risks about which many older homeowners are unaware or uninformed](#). Although they can help some seniors stay in their home and pay off debts, they do this by using up home equity. Many seniors do not find out they have used all the equity in their home until they need to tap into it in order to move out of the home or into a nursing facility, and discover they cannot afford to. They also face increased risk of foreclosure, either from an inability to keep the house in good repair, falling behind on taxes and fees, or even their loans coming due if they are forced to spend an extended time in an assisted living facility while recovering from health problems.

SOLUTION: Draft and introduce legislation dealing with issues resulting from reverse mortgages.

ADMINISTRATIVE PRIORITIES



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH: Having strong, efficient and fair health care insurance options, such as Marketplace plans, expanded Medicaid, and the Essential Plan have been a win-win-win for New York and for New Yorkers. The state must continue to work with advocates to advance the strongest possible consumer protections, monitor and react carefully to Federal level developments, and ensure the huge gains in the number of New Yorkers able to access health insurance are retained.

SOLUTION: Empire Justice will continue to work with the Department of Health through issue spotting, educating and working collaboratively on improving the ways in which people can access and use health coverage and crafting innovative approaches to meet consumer needs.



NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT: New York State released [guidelines for transgender and gender non-conforming students](#) in 2015 which have been extremely successful in creating safer, more equitable school environments for New York students, and even cited at the [national level](#). However, implementation of these guidelines has been variable across the state, meaning too many students are still being left behind.

SOLUTION: Empire Justice Center will work with NYSED and other advocates to create and implement a regulation that will ensure that every student has access to an equal opportunity at education, regardless of gender identity or expression.



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