

Juanita O. Lewis
Community Voices Heard Power
Testimony submitted to the Joint Fiscal Committees
on the SFY 2025-2026 Executive Budget
Human Services Budget Hearing
February 12, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the FY 2026 New York State Executive Budget. On behalf of Community Voices Heard Power, the largest, Black-led base building organization in New York, I am proud to advocate for the needs of low income people, particularly women of color, in our membership and across the state by raising the call for New York to move toward a Guaranteed income (GI). CVHP is a proud member of the [New York State Cash Alliance](#), an advocacy coalition to advance guaranteed income (GI) and cash-related policy in New York.

Our organization began, thirty-years ago, when a group of women in the WEP program came together to fight against the demeaning conditions and miniscule compensation for women receiving public support. Since that time, CVHP has continued to uplift the voices of low income people who are generally left out of the discussion.

The philosophy behind guaranteed income is simple: the current economy is failing most people, particularly the membership of Community Voices Heard Power and our sister organization Community Voices Heard. The most direct and transformative way to address this issue is to provide cash directly to low-income people, and trust that we know how to spend it. Our members are smart and capable. We know that low income New Yorkers can and should be trusted to do what is best for themselves and their communities

Currently, there are more than 100 pilot programs operating across 25 states, with nearly 60,000 people receiving unconditional cash. The overwhelming evidence from guaranteed income demonstrations across the U.S., including New York, show that unconditional cash helps people work, advance economically, plan for the future, and strengthens community ties.

We must create a path toward a Guaranteed Income in New York State by expanding current programs and creating more of them.

The Executive Budget includes several proposals to expand direct cash support for New Yorkers, including expanded tax credits and a “BABY” benefit to assist parents during pregnancy. The FY26 Executive Budget also proposed allocating \$3 billion in surplus money to a nonrefundable “Inflation Refund” tax credit. These payments recognize that New Yorkers are capable of making the right financial decisions for themselves and their families— but only affords this dignity to those in the middle class. Community Voices Heard Power appreciates that the Governor is recognizing the economic stress New Yorkers face, particularly amidst continuing high inflation, and the Governor’s embrace of direct cash support as a strategy to fight poverty and promote family well-being.

We urge the Legislature to channel the proposed allocation of \$3 billion for Inflation Refund Payments toward strategies that would target lower-income New Yorkers who are struggling most. These payments could be restructured to better serve low-income New Yorkers by making the credit refundable, increasing the amount of the credit by targeting it to families under 200% of the poverty line or by providing the maximum benefit only to the lowest income New Yorkers, and increasing the frequency of the payments to quarterly or monthly.

This funding could also be used to fund any of the other legislative proposals for unrestricted cash that the Cash Alliance supports.

As champions of guaranteed income, we believe deeply in ensuring that every New Yorker has a baseline of support in life. Yet moving toward that goal requires prioritizing those most in need. Recommendations in this testimony – including investing in direct cash transfers, raising public assistance benefit levels while reducing conditions on assistance, and expanding tax credits – would dramatically improve the material conditions of New Yorkers' lives.

Specifically, we urge the legislature to pass the eight pieces of legislation in our policy platform to tackle the state's cost of living crisis.

- **Baby Bucks Allowance Bill (S.2132/A.1597):** provides direct cash assistance to income-eligible parents, for the last three months of pregnancy and first 18 months of a child's life.
- **Reentry Assistance Bill (A.193):** increases the amount of money some receive coming home from incarceration.
- **Transition Age Youth Bill (S.3102):** establishes an unconditional cash assistance program for youth leaving foster care as young adults.
- **Child and Family Wellbeing Act Bill (A.63):** establishes a fund for communities to use to support the needs of children and families, including cash assistance.
- **The Working Families Tax Credit (S.2082/A.3474):** improves and expands tax credits provided to families quarterly on a sliding scale based on income.
- **Cash Assistance Reform Package:** a package of bills relating to reforming current cash assistance programs, including increasing the benefit amount (**A.106/S.1127**), establishing parity for homeless recipients (**A.108/S.113**) and helping working recipients to save more (**S.182**).

Conclusion

New York state has the highest levels of income inequality in the country. While a few people are doing very well, low income and working people are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet.

The overwhelming evidence from guaranteed income demonstrations across the U.S., including New York, show that unconditional cash helps people to work, advance economically, and plan for the future; builds strong and resilient families; supports people providing care to loved ones during times of crisis; and strengthens community ties. There are more than 100 pilot programs operating across 35 states in the US, with nearly 60,000 people receiving unconditional cash. Government leaders from across the political spectrum are embracing guaranteed income as a critical part of public policy to promote economic mobility, support family integrity, and move people out of homelessness.

Right here in New York, programs are operating in Hudson, Mount Vernon, Buffalo, Rochester, New York City, and Ulster County. These homegrown guaranteed income pilots are showing that unrestricted cash benefits a wide range of people in diverse communities and geographies.

It is time for our state to join these efforts.

Thank you for considering our testimony. Please reach out to juanita@cvhpower.org if you have any questions.