



Thank you for the opportunity to testify before this Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Taxes.

My name is Rebecca Saletan. I am a founding member of Indivisible Harlem, a citizen action group that has energetically joined the campaign for Budget Justice (aka revenue reform).

I would like to explain why constituents like myself, the so-called Blue Wave, consisting mostly of middle- and upper-middle-class people who have been newly politically engaged since 2016, care so much about the extreme and growing state of inequality in our state and are so committed to pressuring our electeds to raise the revenue to create a better, safer, fairer state for us all.

Many of us came to activism with particular issues at the forefront, often of personal concern: reproductive rights, immigration, rent reform. When we recognized that no meaningful progress could occur on those issues until both parts of the legislature were in the control of leadership in sympathy with our values, we joined with those who had been in the struggle far longer than we had to help that happen. But while we celebrated the many electoral wins of last year, we learned that meaningful progress on many others - housing and homelessness, education, healthcare, and the environment chief among them - was being thwarted by an austerity narrative that has been promulgated in our state, resulting in chronic underfunding—and the normalization of underfunding—urgent needs.

Reason tells us this should not be so: We are one of the wealthiest states in the country - we rank second or third, depending who is doing the math - and yet we are number one in inequality. That is not the way New York should be leading our country - and we do have an opportunity to lead. Public support, as reported in two recent state polls—more than nine out of ten of us in the most recent, by Hart Research Associates, including strong majorities of Republicans as well as Democrats—is overwhelmingly in favor of taxing the very wealthy. This is the will of the people: the legislature should muster its own political will to match it.

Some of the issues that motivate people like me have their roots in deep personal concern. I live in a rent-stabilized apartment that has allowed me to put down deep community roots for more than three decades - a privilege I try to repay through civic engagement. In other cases, personal experience gives us perspective on inequities. I put my twin daughters through good public schools in New York City. But while I am

grateful for that experience, running fundraising for the PTA for two years gave me a window on the massive inequities that leave some kids with far more than the “sound, basic education” that the state guarantees – and many kids (especially poor, black, and brown kids) with far less. So I look at the \$4 billion public school kids still await through that lens, and I know the situation has only grown more inequitable. We all feel the effects of the climate emergency, which is deepening more quickly than many expected. And similarly, we know that its effects will fall most harshly on poor, black, and brown people. The CLCPA means nothing if we don't adequately fund it, and our friends in WE ACT for Environmental Justice, NY Renews, and other groups tell us that the \$1 billion they are asking for in this budget is the bare minimum to even begin to make the needed changes.

More broadly, we know that even where we are not directly affected, the inequality in our state is tearing at both the physical infrastructure of our state and its social fabric, as it affects transportation, schools, the quality of healthcare, the availability of affordable housing, and more. I have daughters who have just graduated from college and would like to return to New York to settle. Will they be able to afford it? I wonder, but also: What kind of state will they be inheriting?

It's not as if you electeds need to look far to find the means to create a more equitable New York. The Budget Justice campaign has put forward fourteen a platform of fourteen well-developed measures for progressive taxation, backed by the work of the Fiscal Policy Institute and the Strong Economy for All coalition and most with legislator sponsorship, that would raise up to an estimated additional \$40 billion per year. That sounds like a lot, to an ordinary person, but 1) it is not an enormous amount relative to the size of the budget as a whole; 2) the additional revenue bite will barely be felt by those who are affected; and 3) this amount is barely enough to address our most pressing issues, which we have allowed to go underfunded under an unwarranted narrative of austerity in our extremely wealthy state.

If you support this platform, you will find people like me and groups like mine continuing to do our utmost to raise public awareness and bring public pressure to bear on the most important commitment to the public good you could possibly make.