



**Testimony before the
Joint Legislative Hearing Committee on 2023 Executive Budget Proposal:
Public Protection**

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My name is Lauren Melodia, and I am the Deputy Director of Economic and Fiscal Policies at the Center for New York City Affairs at The New School. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

I am writing to provide feedback on and recommendations about the Executive Budget proposal to continue and expand the “youth employment program” in Gun Involved Violence Elimination (GIVE) jurisdictions. My research demonstrates the importance of expanding job training and placement programs as part of the state’s crime reduction strategy, but also points to the importance of making these programs available to adults and people returning home from prison and jail, in addition to youth.

Last week, I published a report [*Crime in the Time of Covid: How Economic Conditions and Policies Shape Public Safety in New York City*](#).¹ The report combines analysis of recent crime and economic data with a review of established empirical literature on how economic conditions and policies have and can play a role in reducing crime in New York State.

Research shows that having a quality job can be effective in deterring someone from committing a crime, especially property crimes. Furthermore, economic policies that reduce inequality, such as raising the minimum wage, can be highly effective in deterring all types of crimes. This research also shows, as noted above, that the populations who are most responsive to the crime deterrence benefits of employment are adults and people returning home from prison (especially Black and Latinx formerly incarcerated individuals). Compared to older adults, youth are less responsive to the crime deterrence benefits of employment.

Much of the recent focus on gun violence prevention in New York has focused on youth. This coincides with the well-established concept of the age-crime curve, where criminal behavior is understood to peak in young adulthood. Consistent with this theory, a higher percentage of youth commit crimes in New York City than other age groups. However, prior to the pandemic, the youth crime rate in the city was in rapid decline. Figure 1 shows the shooting incident rates per 100,000 residents in each age group in New York City from 2010 to 2021. It illustrates how this

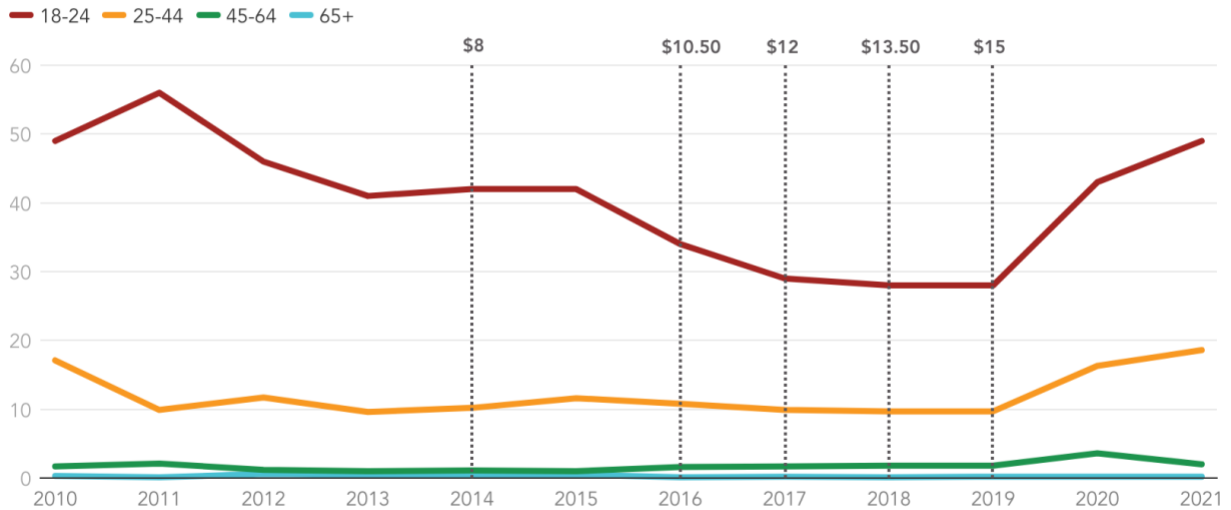
¹ Lauren Melodia, “Crime in the Time of Covid: How Economic Conditions and Policies Shape Public Safety in New York City,” Center for NYC Affairs, January 2023, <https://www.centernyc.org/reports-briefs/crime-in-the-time-of-covid-how-economic-conditions-and-policies-shape-public-safety-in-new-york-city>.

rapid decline in youth shooting incidents coincided with a doubling of the minimum wage – an economic policy that overwhelmingly impacted youth, as new entrants to the labor market. Figure 1 also illustrates how shooting incidents amongst both youth and adults ages 25-to-44 have been increasing since the pandemic began.

Figure 1

Youth rates of gun violence was rapidly declining in the decade before the pandemic

Shootings per 100,000 residents in each age group



Note: The vertical dotted lines denote the value of the minimum wage, enacted by state law in that year, for fast food workers. The minimum wage in New York City was \$7.25 before 2014.

Source: CNYCA analysis of "NYPD Shooting Incident Data (Historic)," NYC Open Data.

New York City, like many communities in the United States, has experienced an increase in crime since the pandemic began. One critical example of this is the national gun violence epidemic, which I applaud the Governor for prioritizing in the Executive Budget. Property crime has also been rising over the past year. A report by the Council on Criminal Justice analyzing 2022 crime data from 35 cities, shows that property crime—grand larceny of motor vehicles in particular—rose in 2022.²

New York City is experiencing a more pronounced and prolonged economic impact from Covid compared to most other large cities and the nation: a slower recovery of pandemic-induced job loss and higher unemployment. Today, New Yorkers are still struggling from the pandemic. The loss of jobs in face-to-face industries (like retail and construction) and the expiration of federal assistance—such as enhanced unemployment insurance and the Child Tax Credit—have contributed to an unequal recovery from the pandemic. Low-income, Black and Latinx households in New York City are facing higher rates of unemployment today, which is

² Richard Rosenfeld, Bobby Boxerman and Ernesto Lopez, "Pandemic, Social Unrest, and Crime in U.S. Cities: Year-End 2022 Update," Council on Criminal Justice, January 2023, <https://counciloncj.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/CCJ%E2%80%93Crime-Trends-Year-End-2022-Word-for-PDF.pdf>.

exacerbating economic inequality in the city. These economic conditions are likely a main driver in New York City's recent rise in property crime and point to the importance of the State's 2023-24 public protection budget including targeted job training and placement programs that are well designed to deter crime.

Governor Kathy Hochul's Executive Budget expands on state investments made in recent years to provide workforce development programming to youth ages 18-to-24 years old in (GIVE) jurisdictions. While I applaud the effort to continue and expand this program, I urge the State Legislature to eliminate the age restrictions in Governor Hochul's proposal. Making the program available to adults as well as youth will allow service providers to maximize the program's effectiveness by serving populations who are proven to be most responsive to the crime deterrence benefits of employment.

The current New York State Department of Labor's (NYSDOL) Gun Violence Prevention Initiative matches justice-involved individuals and/or residents of neighborhoods that have high gun violence rates with job training and permanent job placement. In New York City, the Consortium for Worker Education (CWE) runs the program. CWE works with 20 existing workforce development organizations to provide a wide variety of free educational services, industry-specific training, credentialing, and job placement for 18-to-24-year-olds who are not in school and live in 58 zip codes where increased gun violence has erupted in recent years. By contracting with CWE and its partners that are longstanding organizations in the city's workforce and community development systems, the program connects participants to many opportunities.

While it may be too early to have substantial evidence of the success of the NYSDOL program, there are other targeted workforce development programs in high crime areas that demonstrate the benefits of including all working age adults in their catchment area. The Precision Employment Initiative, established by former Mayor Bill de Blasio and expanded by Mayor Eric Adams, prioritizes permanently employing adults in neighborhoods facing high crime. BlocPower, a Brooklyn-based climate technology company, manages the funding's first initiative: the Civilian Climate Corps (CCC). The program provides paid job-readiness and technical training to adults of all ages in a variety of green energy fields, paid on-site internships, and job placement. Since its inception, BlocPower focused its recruitment efforts in the area near three specific police precincts with high rates of gun violence, but had no age restrictions for participants. As a result of the company's recruitment efforts on geography alone, 97 percent of its members are Black and Latinx, 22 percent are formerly incarcerated, and 27 percent have been directly impacted by gun violence. BlocPower has been monitoring gun violence in the communities from which it recruits members. Comparing the first three quarters of 2022 to the first three quarters of 2021, there was a 28 percent decline in gun violence across these precincts.

BlocPower's early success illustrates how the Executive Budget proposal to continue and expand the "youth employment program" in GIVE jurisdictions misses the opportunity to be most effective at reducing crime if it is limited to youth. Last week, at the State Legislature's joint hearing on crime data, representatives from the New York Police Department (NYPD) and Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ) announced that they had identified approximately 2,000 individuals who have a "recent persistent pattern" of criminal activity and that the majority of crime in the city can be attributed to this small number of individuals. It would be a grave

error to design crime deterrence employment programs, where any of these individuals could be disqualified for participation solely based on their age.

I also urge the State Legislature to design this budget allocation so that it is made available to justice-involved people, including people who are leaving prison or jail or are currently on probation or in a diversion program – regardless of their criminal offenses or whether or not their current residence is in a GIVE jurisdiction. Research shows that formerly incarcerated people are the most responsive to the crime deterrent benefits of having a quality job. Integrating access to this targeted employment program to various touchpoints throughout the criminal justice system can increase the effectiveness of the program. Rather than relying on the chance that an eligible person in need find marketing and outreach materials about the program in their neighborhood, justice-involved people will be able to more easily access this program if they are handed information about the program or, better yet, have a court official or social worker schedule a referral appointment to the program at the time of sentencing; as they are preparing to reenter society from jail, prison or an alternative-to-incarceration program; or at a first meeting with a parole or probation officer. This important program and budget allocation can be further improved with passage of the Reentry from the Inside Out bill (A.7340/S.804), which would require the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision to coordinate with social service agencies and non-profits to assist with benefits applications before release, and would establish a pilot program to provide access to a range of reentry services before and after release.

Lastly, considering the importance of employment for deterring crime amongst formerly incarcerated individuals, this important budget commitment can be made more effective with passage of the Clean Slate NY bill (A.06399). Job training and placement services to deter crime amongst at-risk populations are hindered if participants face barriers to employment or discrimination in the labor market due to their criminal history. Having a criminal record makes it harder for formerly incarcerated individuals to get employment or obtain mainly occupational licenses, even though the crime deterrence benefits of employment are strongest for this group. With some exceptions, the Clean Slate NY bill would automatically clear a misdemeanor conviction three years after sentencing and a felony conviction seven years after sentencing, excluding time spent incarcerated and applying after completion of parole or probation. This automatic sealing would happen so long as the person has no pending charges or new convictions during the three- or seven-year period.

Recent economic and crime data demonstrate that employment programs would be highly effective at reducing crime in New York at this time. However, these programs can be made most effective if designed to serve working people of all ages in communities facing high crime rates, as well as justice involved people regardless of whether or not their current residence is in a GIVE jurisdiction. I urge the State Legislature to change the Executive Budget proposal to address these issues and pass legislation this session that removes barriers for justice-involved people to access these critical programs. My report *Crime in the Time of Covid* also discusses other economic policies that can make the recovery from the pandemic more equitable and, as a result, increase public safety in New York.

Thank you.