



**Testimony**  
**New York State Assembly Budget Forum – Westchester Delegation**  
**February 10, 2023**

**Submitted by**  
**Luz Tavarez**  
**on behalf of The Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of The Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York - a federation of 90 contracting agencies and providers of social services - on the challenges we face entering the FY 2024 budget season. I am Luz Tavarez, director of public and community engagement.

The Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York seeks to uphold the dignity of each person as made in the image of God by serving the basic needs of the poor, troubled, frail and oppressed of all religions. We collaborate with parishes, as well as non-Catholic and Catholic partners, to build a compassionate and just society. Through a network of administered, sponsored, and affiliated agencies, Catholic Charities delivers, coordinates, and advocates for quality human services and programs touching almost every human need.

**Human Services Investment & Workforce Retention**

The COVID-19 pandemic may officially be over, but we are still experiencing the dramatic impacted caused by it. Primarily, we continue to struggle with the recruitment and retention of staff across the 90 federation agencies. Our human services workforce has long struggled with inequities that are now compounded by strains due to vacancies and some of the unintended consequences of COVID bonuses and COLA's that have not extended to the entire human services workforce. I mention this first, because any investments the State makes, must include an investment in our workforce.

- Catholic Charities advocates for the State to dedicate further sustainable resources that reflect the true cost of human services contracts and covers all costs incurred in implementing government mandates.

**Housing & Homelessness**

Catholic Charities' dedication to helping the homeless extends to a variety of services that offer safety and shelter to those who need it most, including providing emergency shelter,

preventing evictions, building, and sustaining permanent affordable and supportive housing, offering housing support services, and helping clients find temporary and transitional housing.

- Catholic Charities supports a state policy to ensure that all New Yorkers statewide earning less than 50% of the Area Median Income do not pay more than 30% of their income on rent. This program could be a combination of tax credits or deductions that refund a household for excess rent paid and/or subsidies like Section 8 vouchers.
- Catholic Charities supports the State's goal of increasing and incentivizing affordable and supportive housing development, as well as the provision of funds that will increase the ability of municipalities to collaborate with nonprofits like the Association for New York Catholic Homes to allow increase housing availability throughout the State.
- Catholic Charities advocates for passage of the Housing Access Voucher Program (S.568-A) to enable those who are homeless or facing the imminent loss of housing to obtain permanent housing or remain permanent housed.
- Catholic Charities advocates for the passage of A.2974/S.569 and S.2960, to reduce the rent burden of Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) recipients and to help ensure more low income seniors and people with disabilities can access and retain these benefits.

### **Immigration & Refugee Services**

For more than four decades, Catholic Charities has been committed to welcoming New York's immigrants—families seeking to reunify, children, refugees, the undocumented, workers, and many other vulnerable newcomers. Our work reaches communities across New York City and the Lower Hudson Valley, serving over 100,000 people each year.

- Catholic Charities supports Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or humanitarian parole and work authorization and increased funding to meet the legal, social, and educational needs of those fleeing violence and oppression, especially those from Venezuela, Afghanistan, Haiti and the Ukraine.
- Catholic Charities supports investments to help serve these new arrivals and calls for the State to be prepared to offer additional assistance to nonprofits providing necessary case management assistance to these populations should federal assistance not materialize.
- Catholic Charities appreciates recent state investments in resettlement support for Ukrainian refugees and asks for continued and enhanced program support for its programs that are funded through the Office of New Americans, such as the Liberty Defense Program, the Pro-bono Initiative and the New Americans Hotline that continue to provide trusted services for both new and established immigrant New Yorkers.

### **Mental Health**

Catholic Charities promotes compassionate, appropriate, and preventive care for children and families facing abuse, mental health trauma and substance use disorder, and encourages additional state investment in these services and supports for vulnerable New Yorkers.

- Catholic Charities supports increased funding for affordable and supporting housing and looks forward to working with the State to develop and operate housing that provides quality care and services to this population.
- Catholic Charities supports these investments and calls for additional resources to provide students with services that combat mental health challenges and pandemic trauma and learning loss.
- Catholic Charities supports additional operational and capital investment in detox and substance abuse treatment programs that promote sustained recovery.

On behalf of New York's most vulnerable, and the 90 human services agencies in the Catholic Charities Federation, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and thank you for continuing to serve this great State of New York. Please do not hesitate to contact me for additional detail at [luz.tavarez@archny.org](mailto:luz.tavarez@archny.org) or 914-384-3079.