

New York State Joint Budget Hearing on Agriculture and Parks

FY 2027 Executive Budget

The Horticultural Society of New York

Dear Chairs Kim, Serrano, Lupardo, and Hinchey, and members of the Committees,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the record of the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Agriculture & Markets and Parks & Recreation. My name is Sara Hobel, and I serve as President and Chief Executive Officer of The Horticultural Society of New York, known as The Hort.

The Hort respectfully requests \$250,000 in the FY2027 New York State Budget to sustain and expand public horticulture, education, and therapeutic horticulture services that improve community well-being and increase greenery and tree canopy – particularly in dense, low-resource settings.

For more than a century, The Hort has brought the benefits of plants and horticultural care into the everyday places where New Yorkers live, learn, and receive services. Our mission is intentionally practical: we focus on the places that are hardest to green and most in need of sustained care. We design, install, and maintain planted spaces that reduce heat exposure, support mental and physical health, and make public and residential environments safer and more welcoming.

Today, The Hort serves more than 500 sites citywide, including over 65 supportive and affordable housing locations. Our programs operate in supportive housing, older-adult settings, schools, and justice-involved environments. Across these settings, we combine durable planting and horticultural expertise with education and therapeutic engagement that supports physical health, mental health, stress reduction, and community connection.

Our work is designed not as one-time beautification, but as ongoing horticultural stewardship, ensuring that plantings thrive over time and that public investments deliver lasting benefits.

A core example of the State's impact through partnership with The Hort is our operation of the Greenhouse and Education Center at Denny Farrell Riverbank State Park in Harlem, in collaboration with New York State Parks. This facility is the only educational garden and greenhouse located within a public park in New York City. Through this center, The Hort reaches more than 12,000 residents, families, and schoolchildren each year with free, year-round classes, workshops, school programs, and public events. It is a vital community asset that connects urban residents, many of whom live in nearby high-density neighborhoods, to hands-on environmental learning, horticulture, and nature.

Access to plants and green space is not a luxury—it is a public good with demonstrated benefits for health, safety, and community well-being. Yet many New Yorkers, particularly those living in dense neighborhoods and institutional settings, lack reliable access to green space or to nature-based programming that is consistent and well maintained.

Horticulture requires time, care, and continuity. Stable state support allows The Hort to deliver year-round planting, education, and therapeutic horticulture services—and to maintain planted spaces so they continue to function as safe, healthy, and welcoming environments.

State investment also supports paid, supervised horticultural roles that provide training, skill-building, and employment experience while ensuring consistent care of public and residential sites. These positions strengthen the nature-based workforce and help keep public spaces green, safe, and functional over time.

A \$250,000 state appropriation would allow The Hort to:

- Sustain and expand community-based horticulture and planting that increases greenery and tree canopy in streets, housing sites, campuses, and other hard-to-plant environments;
- Expand therapeutic horticulture services in supportive housing, older-adult settings, and justice-involved environments; and
- Maintain reliable, year-round care of planted spaces across hundreds of sites, ensuring that State and local investments continue to deliver benefits over time.

The Horticultural Society of New York exists to ensure that the benefits of plants, green space, and horticultural care reach the New Yorkers who need them most—where they already live and receive services. State support is essential to sustaining this work at scale.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to submit this testimony. We would welcome the chance to meet with staff, provide additional information, or host a site visit to demonstrate the impact of this work firsthand.

Sara Hobel
President and Chief Executive Officer
The Horticultural Society of New York