



**Joint New York State Legislative Hearing on Human Services
Senate Committee on Finance & Assembly Ways and Means
Committee**

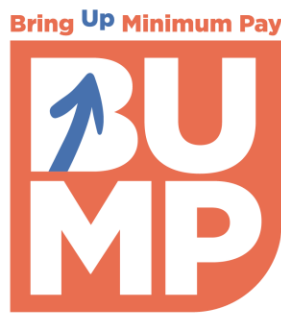
**Thursday, February 5, 2026
Testimony for Submission**

The Bring Up Minimum Pay (BUMP) Campaign would like to thank Senate Finance Committee Chair Liz Krueger and Assembly Ways and Means Committee Chair J. Gary Pretlow and committee members for the opportunity to submit testimony on the plight of human services workers in New York State. Workers in this sector are predominantly women, people of color and foreign-born, and they work in non-profit or human services organizations that provide critical services to New Yorkers including children; youth; seniors; adults and families experiencing homelessness; and individuals with developmental, mental, and physical disabilities. Each and every day human service workers commit to serving families and communities, addressing poverty, building independence and meeting the needs (food, shelter, childcare) of those they serve and more, yet they struggle to make ends meet and largely live in poverty.

The BUMP Campaign urges the legislature to pass S8337-A (Comrie)/A9082 (Reyes) to increase base wages for the lowest paid human services workers to \$29 per hour, or 400% of the Federal Poverty Level, to reflect a true cost of living. BUMP also requests that the FY27 budget provide a 2.7% cost of living adjustment (COLA) for providers.

Overview: The Bring Up Minimum Pay (BUMP) Campaign

The Bring Up Minimum Pay (BUMP) Campaign is an anti-poverty campaign focused on lifting human service workers out of poverty by establishing a wage floor of \$29 per hour, or 400% of the Federal Poverty Level, with annual adjustments based on inflation. The campaign was launched in the fall of 2023 by leaders in government and the nonprofit sectors to address the challenges of historically low wages of human services workers. These caretakers work to support and bring out of poverty individuals, families, and communities, often while living in

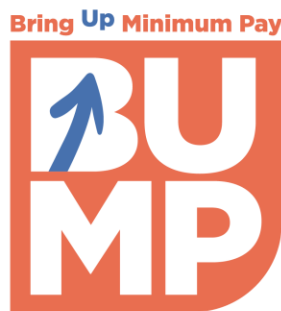


poverty themselves. Low wages make it difficult for nonprofit organizations to recruit and retain staff, putting the communities that rely on their support most at risk for interrupted or discontinued services.

BUMP seeks to address this problem by raising base wages for the lowest paid human services workers through a two-pronged strategy. First, through legislation sponsored by Senator Leroy Comrie and Assemblymember Karines Reyes (S8337-A/A9082), and second, through data on the human service sector commissioned from the City University of New York's Institute for State & Local Governance (CUNY ISLG). CUNY ISLG conducted a three-part analysis of the nonprofit human services sector, wage disparities, and the return on investment of establishing a wage floor for human service workers within New York State. This analysis draws on data provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)— specifically the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW)— alongside insights from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) to evaluate wage trends in the human services sector.

Human Services Workers in New York State

The human services sector has a significant presence throughout the state, with one in nine, or nearly one million employees in New York working in this field. The industry is primarily composed of women (90%), people of color (75%), and foreign-born workers (70%). Based on research conducted by CUNY ISLG, home health aides, nursing assistants, and childcare workers comprise 80% of human services employees and are the lowest paid in the sector. These workers - approximately 690,000 individuals - face disproportionately higher rates of poverty and reliance on public benefits compared to other workforces in New York State. Additionally, these roles have the most restricted wage growth with only a \$10,000 or less difference between the lowest paid and the highest paid. There is virtually no career pathway for meaningful wage growth in these most critical fields.



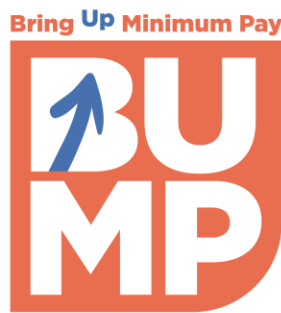
Researchers also found that human services workers are underpaid by approximately \$7 billion annually and that addressing this gap to align wages with the true cost of living would cost an additional \$6-\$12 per hour for full-time employees. To further highlight wage disparities, Figure 1 shows the wage gap between the average salaries of home health aides, nursing assistants, and childcare workers compared to the cost of living across the state. The data clearly illustrates that the wages for these essential occupations are only marginally above the state minimum wage and fall well below the calculated living wage standards.

Figure 1: Wage Gap Between Average Wages by Occupation and Cost of Living Thresholds, New York State



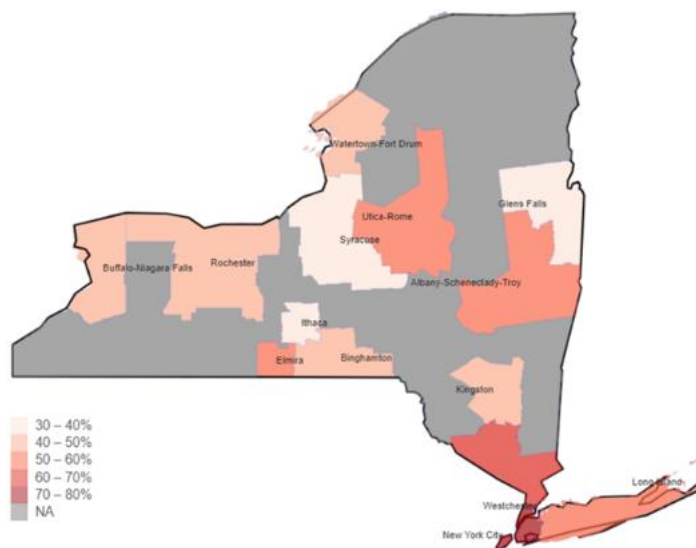
Sources: CUNY ISLG analysis of Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages data; Self-Sufficiency Standard at the Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Amy K. Glasmeier, "Living Wage Calculator," Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2024.

The disparity between real wages and the cost of living varies across New York State. In upstate areas, human services workers are more likely to earn wages closer to the living wage. However, as Figure 2 portrays, the situation for human services workers in the New York City



area remains challenging, with over 70% of human services employees in that region earning below what is necessary to afford basic living expenses.

Figure 2: Percent of Single-Adult Human Services Households Earning Below the Self-Sufficiency Standard by Region



Note: Human Services Households are defined as including at least one worker with a human services-related occupation. This map only includes one-person (single adult) households.

Sources: CUNY ISLG's calculation of US Census Bureau's American Community Survey microdata accessed via IPUMS USA (2022); Self-Sufficiency Standard at the Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington.

Addressing the Gap Between Human Services Wages and the Cost of Living

Government contracts are the main funding source for nonprofit human services organizations and often determine and/or limit within these contracts the wages that providers can give. And the wages often do not cover day-to-day living expenses and necessities like housing, food, and healthcare. Over the past two decades, wages for human services workers have remained virtually stagnant in comparison to their counterparts in the private sector.



Most human services workers across New York State, especially those with children, earn wages that are below the true cost of living. Workers with children experience the largest gap between wages and the cost of living due to the high cost of childcare and living expenses. The average wage for employees working in this sector is approximately \$40,000, while the estimated cost of living ranges from \$56,000 to \$60,000, resulting in an annual shortfall of about \$20,000 per worker.

Table 1 details the wage thresholds associated with each cost-of-living methodology used in the analysis undertaken by CUNY ISLG. Using New York’s minimum wage as a reference, and 400% of the Federal Poverty Threshold, those thresholds were compared to the average wage for human service workers.

Table 1. Summary of Cost-of-Living Thresholds by Household Size in New York

Cost-of-Living or Wage Threshold	Threshold Value for a One-Person Household	Average Wages for Human Services-Related Industries	Wage Gap
400% of the Federal Poverty Threshold	\$60,240	\$40,670	\$19,570
Self Sufficiency Standard (NYC Average)	\$59,394		\$18,724
Living Wage Calculator	\$55,869		\$15,199
<i>New York City Region Minimum Wage</i>	<i>\$33,280</i>		<i>(\$7,390)</i>

Notes: The Self-Sufficiency Standard and the Living Wage Calculator are location-specific. Sources: CUNY ISLG analysis of Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages data; Self-Sufficiency Standard at the Center for Women’s Welfare, University of Washington; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Amy K. Glasmeier, “Living Wage Calculator,” Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2024.

Leaving the base wage and the gap between wages and the cost of living unaddressed may have serious implications. Not only are the individuals who are delivering services to alleviate poverty forced to live in poverty, but whole communities are put at risk. Low wages lead to



higher turnover and difficulty in recruiting staff. Moreover, workers are exhausted and stretched thin - often working multiple jobs just to make ends meet. Without fully staffed human services workers delivering quality services, essential services are jeopardized, especially those services that are provided to vulnerable communities.

However, raising base pay above poverty level to \$29 per hour for a full-time service worker could generate annually an estimated \$575 million in additional state income tax revenue, \$400 million in additional sales tax revenue, and up to \$23 billion in increased economic activity statewide. This would pull over 100,000 human services workers out of poverty and improve the lives of approximately 664,500 human services workers (88% of the workforce) currently experiencing economic insecurity. By raising base wages for human service workers, New York State would not only reduce poverty for some of the state's most essential care workers, but it would also strengthen critical services and generate billions in economic activity.

Recommendations

The BUMP Campaign recommends the legislature pass S8337-A (Comrie)/A9082 (Reyes) to increase base wages for the lowest paid human services workers to reflect a true cost of living. BUMP is advocating for wages to be raised to \$29 per hour or 400% of the FPL, whichever is greater, for human services workers that serve our most vulnerable populations. Such increases can be phased in over time until they reach \$29 per hour and then thereafter be tied to inflation to ensure wages are keeping pace. Funding should be provided to the respective agencies to ensure state contracts and reimbursements for organizations and subcontractors are sufficient to cover the cost of increased wages.

BUMP also supports the need for COLAs for human service providers and supports legislation to expand the COLA. BUMP supports a 2.7% COLA or targeted inflationary increase because a true cost of living wage floor, paired with annual cost of living adjustments that reflect the real rates of rising costs is necessary to change the economic trajectory for this vital workforce.



The BUMP Campaign looks forward to working with the New York State Legislature and other key stakeholders to address wage justice for human services workers. If you have any additional questions, please contact Chanya Holness at chanya.holness@nyfoundling.org.