



**Written Testimony
NYS 2026 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Human Services
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**Submitted by:
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on the needs of the human services workforce. My name is Cristina Abbattista, and I am the Policy Analyst at Urban Pathways.

Urban Pathways is a nonprofit homeless services and supportive housing provider serving single adults. Last year, we served over 2,500 unique individuals through a full continuum of services including street outreach, drop-in services, safe havens and stabilization beds, extended-stay residence, and permanent supportive housing in Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. We also offer a wide range of additional programming to meet the needs of the people we serve, including our Total Wellness, Employment, and Advocacy Programs. We hold contracts with the Office of Mental Health for licensed residential programs and permanent supportive housing, both congregate and scattered site models.

Providing supportive housing and homeless services is not possible without the hard work and dedication of our frontline staff. Our programs rely on case managers to connect the people we serve with services and resources to achieve their goals, maintenance workers to keep buildings clean and well-maintained, security staff to ensure the safety of our residents, and cooks to prepare healthy meals. Unfortunately, many human services organizations including Urban Pathways are struggling to fill essential positions. Urban Pathways currently has a 16% staff vacancy rate. Ultimately, this reality has the most negative impact on the people we serve, as staff vacancies strain service capacity and limit our ability to deliver consistent, high-quality care. It also places added strain on existing staff members who must absorb additional responsibilities.

Urban Pathways staff are part of an 800,000-person nonprofit human services workforce providing essential services to the most vulnerable New Yorkers on behalf of the government. This workforce, predominantly women (70%) and people of color (75%), makes 30% less than their government counterparts doing comparable work. The average salary of core nonprofit human services workers in 2023 was \$36,688. This places the human services sector as the third lowest-paying industry in New York City, trailing low-wage restaurant and retail sectors.

Government is the primary funder of human services nonprofits through government contracts, and we have faced years of persistent underfunding. Although program costs rise with inflation, the funding in State contracts does not, leaving nonprofits struggling to cover costs. In light of the impact of federal funding cuts, New Yorkers need our services now more than ever, and our sector needs to be adequately resourced to weather the challenges ahead. The State must invest in human services nonprofits so that we can fully staff our programs and take care of our workers who take care of New Yorkers in need.

To ensure a fair and comprehensive Human Services COLA, we urge the Legislature to:

- 1. Fund a 2.7% Targeted Inflationary Increase (TII) in the Fiscal Year 2027 Budget to align with the Consumer Price Index.**
- 2. Pass S1580/A2590 to expand the Human Services COLA statute to include all state-contracted human services workers.**
- 3. Pass S3953/A5589 to establish a human services employee wage board to investigate and provide recommendations on equitable wages for the human services sector.**

While a TII is essential for providing increases to the human services workforce in line with inflation, it is not a solution for the low base wages that are a result of underfunded government contracts. Many nonprofit workers leave the sector for higher paying government jobs, where they have comparable responsibilities and get paid 30% more. Nonprofits should not be seen as a training ground for government and private sector work. To do so is a disservice to the people and communities we serve. Nonprofits need to retain high quality, experienced workers to ensure New Yorkers with the greatest needs are receiving the highest quality services possible.

The State must invest in the human services workforce to ensure that we can best serve the communities that rely on us, especially as we face the significant challenges presented by federal budget cuts.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. We look forward to working with you this session to fund a 2.7% TII for human services contracts, ensure this investment is inclusive of the full workforce, and establish a human services employee wage board.

For questions or more information, please contact:

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