

A Just Transition:

Investing In the Jobs New York City Needs

Over the past year, more and more New Yorkers have become active in advocating for the investments New York City needs. This advocacy builds upon decades of organizing by Black, Brown, and poor New Yorkers to secure investments in the health and safety of their communities - investments like supportive housing, youth programs, employment training, well-maintained parks and green spaces, and efforts to reduce pollution.

The investments New Yorkers are calling for could provide needed services and infrastructure for our communities, *and* could also create thousands of jobs. Yet elected officials have resisted widespread calls to divest from law enforcement, citing the jobs that would be lost.

That framing of the issue ignores the fact that **we can and must create opportunities for all New Yorkers to have meaningful work that advances the values of equity, fairness, and respect.** Eliminating law enforcement jobs that are both unnecessary and harmful does not need to equate to unemployment, if electeds take the steps needed to invest in the jobs that can strengthen and transform our City.

In a [panel on June 2nd 2021](#), advocates discussed a range of proposals for investing in the jobs New York City needs, while shifting funds away from punishment and surveillance.

- The [Human Services Council](#) is advocating for the equitable compensation of the City's 662,000 non-profit workers.
- The [Play Fair Campaign](#) is advocating to restore and expand essential funding for hundreds of year-round and seasonal jobs in NYC parks.
- The [Climate Works for All](#) campaign is advocating for 100,000 climate jobs for frontline communities of color.
- The [Dignity in Schools Campaign](#) is advocating to replace police in schools with social and emotional supports that build community and keep young people safe.
- Freedom Agenda is advocating to [#DeflateDOC](#) by eliminating thousands of excess jobs and redirecting those funds to addressing the root causes of incarceration.

The above are just a few efforts among many to create living wage jobs outside of law enforcement, to expand services and supports to New Yorkers, and to better value and compensate for the jobs that help our City and its people thrive. Others include:

- [The Real Re-Entry Campaign](#)
- [Equal Pay for EMS Campaign](#)
- [The Mental Health Crisis Response Program](#). If implemented City-wide, this model would create over 1,600 jobs, while providing a public-health and peer-driven response to mental health crisis calls.

Key Ways to Reframe the Conversation:

- **There *is* enough money.** New York City has the largest police department in the country and one of the highest ratios of officers to residents; a school police division larger than the entire police force in most cities; and the most expensive jail system in the country with the highest ratio of officers to incarcerated people. When human services jobs, Parks jobs, social & emotional support jobs in schools, green jobs, and other essential jobs are not adequately funded, it is because of a choice to maintain the status quo of bloated law enforcement budgets.
- **Good jobs can and do exist outside law enforcement.** The choice to invest so much of New York City's budget in policing and incarceration has meant that law enforcement has become a path to the middle class, including for many people of color. New York City could make a different choice - to invest in, for example, green jobs that can help us meet our goals for a vibrant and climate resilient city, and human services jobs that address root causes of incarceration by addressing unmet needs. New York City can also choose to acknowledge the true value of both city-contracted jobs and a wider range of non-law enforcement city jobs, and provide those workers with the kind of compensation and benefits that have typically been reserved only for law enforcement.
- **Black and Brown workers deserve good jobs that don't depend on criminalizing their communities.** Some elected officials have resisted calls for law enforcement divestment - like eliminating school safety officers and downsizing the Department of Correction - by saying that these jobs are held by women of color or people of color. But elected officials have not shown equivalent concern for the jobs people of color hold in non-law enforcement sectors - for example, human services, a sector in which more than 80% of workers are women of color, and which is subject to constant budget cuts that have resulted in lost jobs and depressed wages. Since February 2020, human services workers in NYC have seen a net-loss of over 44,000 jobs since due to City and State budget cuts connected to COVID-19. Human services jobs include, for example, people who work in supportive housing - a resource that many electeds or candidates have named as crucial to meeting New Yorkers' mental health needs. So why aren't we adequately investing in the jobs held by these women of color, and creating more of them? New York City can also provide training to help people employed in unnecessary law enforcement roles transition to other jobs - jobs that can give them the chance to nourish our communities as counselors, Parks workers, solar-installers, and more.
- **The safest communities tend to be the most well-resourced.** Rather than asking how our schools or streets can be safe while reducing law enforcement spending, we should ask how we can expect them to be safe when so many critical needs go unmet - like housing, healthcare, career-track job training, counseling, park maintenance, and more.

Further reading:

- [Come together from opposite sides of the jail bars - New York Daily News \(nydailynews.com\)](https://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/govt-employees-leave-police-department-2020-07-27)
- [Get safety officers out of schools - New York Daily News \(nydailynews.com\)](https://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/school-safety-officers-leave-2020-07-27)