

THE DE BLASIO YEARS: THE TALE OF A MORE EQUAL CITY

DECEMBER 2021



The Tale of a More Equal City

How the de Blasio Administration has taken on historic inequality in New York City.

On January 1, 2014, the de Blasio Administration took office determined to end the Tale of Two Cities. The phrase was more than a slogan: at that precarious moment in New York City's history, the gap between the wealthy and working people had grown into a chasm. According to James Parrott, an economist at The New School's Center for New York City Affairs, income inequality had been rising or flat for four decades when de Blasio took office in January 2014.

Eight years later, the Administration has made transformative progress in turning the tide and supporting working people. While inequality across the United States has risen drastically over the past eight years nationwide, it has *fallen* in New York City:

- From 2013 to 2019, the poverty rate in New York City declined by a rate of 12.7%. In doing so, the city achieved its lowest poverty rate on record dating back to 2005, when City government began tracking the statistic (NYCgov Poverty report).
- As of 2019, there were 521,000 fewer people in poverty or near poverty than if rates had remained at their 2013 levels (NYCgov Poverty Report).
- From 2013 to 2019, child poverty in New York City decreased by 10.4% (NYCgov Poverty Report).
- From 2013 to 2019, wage share of the bottom half of New York City workers rose by 15%, while it fell for most in the top 20% of earners (forthcoming Center for New York City Affairs report).
- From 2014 to 2019, New York City tax filers in the bottom half of income distribution (between \$4,400 and \$37,800) saw their share of income distribution grow by 1.2% (Independent Budget Office). This stands in stark contrast to the national trend, which saw income for the bottom 90% of earners fall during this same period (James Parrott).
- From 2010 to 2018, real median family income for Black families in New York City rose by 27% (forthcoming Center for New York City Affairs report).

- From 2013 to 2019, the 20th percentile real hourly wage for Black workers in New York City rose by 15%; for Latinx workers, the 20th percentile real hourly wage rose by 24% (forthcoming Center for New York City Affairs report).

How did this happen? Over the past eight years – and through an unprecedented pandemic – the de Blasio Administration has led one of the most concerted civic efforts in modern history to redistribute wealth. Progress has occurred not in one single area of focus, but by addressing inequality *wherever* it existed in the lives of everyday New Yorkers, from early education to health care to the workplace to Broadband access in our communities.

The Administration’s achievements – Universal Pre-K and 3-K; guaranteeing every New Yorker access to primary health care; building affordable housing for hundreds of thousands of people; hiring programs for local underserved communities – have fundamentally re-shaped our city for the long-term. Working families who had never built generational wealth will now do so. Communities that have historically been left behind will be invested in. Resources will continue to shift to those who need them. All of this is the result of a collection of programs, highlighted on the following pages, that have addressed our inequality crisis head on.

Wages & Workers’ Rights

- **Paid Sick Leave:** In March 2014, Mayor de Blasio signed the Earned Sick Time Act, extending paid sick leave to 500,000 New Yorkers and keeping money in working people’s pockets. In 2018 and 2020, the Administration expanded paid sick leave to even more workers, broadened the definition of family, and added safe leave for victims of domestic and sexual abuse. Since 2014, the Administration has closed 2,235 paid sick leave investigations and secured millions in restitution for more than 44,750 workers.
- **\$15 Minimum Wage:** In September 2014, through Executive Order, Mayor de Blasio raised NYC’s Living Wage to \$13.13. In 2016, the City successfully lobbies the New York State legislature to pass the NYC \$15 minimum wage – an increase from \$7.25 in 2013.
- **Launching IDNYC:** In January 2015, the City launched IDNYC – a free, government-issued photo identification and the largest program of its kind in the country, now with nearly 1.4 million cardholders. The card helps eligible New Yorkers access City services and benefits (e.g., SNAP, Cash Assistance), apply for health care, qualify for affordable housing, and provide ID to employers.
- **Paid Family Leave:** In 2015, the City first implemented a new paid parental leave policy for 20,000 New York City employees – providing six weeks of paid

time off at 100% of salary, or up to 12 weeks total when combined with existing leave. As of this report, a total of over 280,000 municipal employees have a negotiated paid parental or paid family leave benefit.

- **Launching the Office of Labor Policy & Standards (OLPS).** In September 2016, the City launched OLPS as part of the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) – creating for the first time an office dedicated to the protection of working New Yorkers. One year later, the Office released its inaugural “State of Workers’ Rights Report.” In 2020, DCA was renamed the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP) to reflect its growing role.
- **Protections for Freelancers.** In 2017, the city implemented the “Freelance Isn’t Free” Act – a first-of-its-kind law to protect independent contractors from wage theft. Since its passage, the Administration has helped freelancers recover more than \$2.1 million in owed compensation for their work.
- **Establishing minimum pay protections for Uber and Lyft drivers.** In December 2018, the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) adopted rules to protect driver earnings. Starting February 1, 2019, high-volume for-hire services (currently Uber and Lyft) have been required to pay drivers a minimum amount for each trip. The pay standard is based on three components: the time of the trip, the distance of the trip, and the share of time that drivers spend with passengers. This minimum pay standard has significantly increased earnings for drivers working for the high-volume companies. Since they were implemented, TLC's driver pay rules have resulted in an aggregate driver pay increase of hundreds of millions of dollars.
- **Scheduling Protections for Fast Food and Retail Workers:** In November 2017, NYC’s Fair Workweek Law went into effect to put an end to unfair and inconsistent scheduling practices in the fast food and retail industries and to create better pathways to full-time employment for fast food workers. Since the law went into effect, the Administration has received more than 300 complaints, closed 110 investigations, and obtained resolutions requiring more than \$2.4 million in combined fines and restitution for more than 3,600 workers. The law was further expanded in July 2021 to include “just cause,” or wrongful discharge, protections for fast food workers.
- **Restoring union contracts for municipal workers.** When Mayor de Blasio took office on January 1, 2014, each of the City's municipal unions had been working for years under expired contracts. As one of its first steps, the Administration resolved the unsettled contracts and negotiated new 7-year collective bargaining agreements. In 2018, a new pattern was established for the 2017-2021 period and currently 88% of the unionized workforce has settled contracts for that period.

Both sets of agreements included health insurance savings targets negotiated between the City and its labor partners.

- **Strengthening Fair Chance protections:** In 2016, Mayor de Blasio signed bills into law that strengthened the New York City Human Rights Law (NYCHRL) – protecting workers against arbitrary denials of employment opportunities based on criminal history and ensuring that job applicants are considered based on their qualifications before their criminal history. These protections reduce collateral employment consequences for New Yorkers who have been arrested or convicted of a crime, helping to level the playing field, particularly for communities that are disproportionately impacted by the criminal legal system, such as people of color and LGBTQ people.
- **Acting to make Salary History a protected class:** In 2017, the city took a major step towards achieving pay equity as Mayor de Blasio signed Intro. 1253 into law – a bill that banned New York City employers from inquiring about the salary history of job applicants. This practice had created cycles of inequity and discrimination in the workplace, as women and people of color were unfairly held back at lower salaries for the same work.
- **Strengthening Source of Income Protections:** In 2020, Mayor de Blasio signed bills strengthening “source of income” protections for tenants – banning the practice of landlords, owners, and real estate brokers refusing to rent (or expressing a preference against) New Yorkers seeking to pay with housing assistance vouchers, subsidies, or other forms of public assistance.
- **Protecting domestic workers:** In 2021, Mayor de Blasio signed into law new workplace protections for domestic workers – including home health aides, house cleaners, and childcare providers – to ensure these essential workers are free from discrimination, harassment, and retaliation in their workplaces.
- **Helping immigrants obtain work permits and more stable immigration status.** In 2015, the de Blasio Administrated launched ActionNYC. Through a network of community-based immigration legal service partners, ActionNYC provides free comprehensive immigration legal screenings and representation to thousands of immigrant New Yorkers each year, in their community and in their preferred language. Over the past five years, ActionNYC helped more than 4,600 New Yorkers achieve more stable immigration status, resulting in an increased ability to work, and access to higher wages and greater job opportunity.
- **Launching NYC Free Tax Prep.** In 2015, the Administration launched NYC Free Tax Prep to expand the availability of free tax preparation services to New

New Yorkers and ensure that families can claim income-boosting tax credits, like the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC), which are proven to lift families out of poverty, without having to pay a commercial preparer. During the past seven years, NYC Free Tax Prep has completed more than 907,000 returns in all five boroughs, saving New Yorkers an estimated \$136 million in tax preparation fees and returning approximately \$1.5 billion in tax refunds to hard-working New Yorkers, including nearly \$640 million in EITC.

Education

- **Universal Pre-K and 3-K.** Possibly the most transformative step in the Administration’s fight against inequality, the Administration established universal Pre-K and 3-K early education for every child in every school district in New York City. Immediately, these programs increase wages in working families – freeing up parents to join the workforce, while children receive high-quality childcare. In the long run, high-quality early education is proven to be strongly associated with success later in life, including economic success.
- **Implementing an “Equity & Excellence” Agenda.** The de Blasio Administration’s education agenda has been built to address inequality over the long-term – offering reading coaches in every elementary school, expanded access to bilingual programs, and equitable access to Computer Science, College Access for All, and AP classes in every high school, all of which set every student up for future success. The Equity and Excellence for All agenda has led to the highest ever graduation and college enrollment rates, the lowest ever drop-out rate, and rising scores on state tests.
- **Creating Community Schools.** Since 2014, the Administration has also transformed public education in New York City through the largest community school initiative in the country, with 317 community schools and 72 community-based organizations (CBOs) currently serving 150,000 students. Community schools partner with CBOs to provide students and their families with additional support – including additional activities after the school and over summer (e.g., arts, sports, book clubs) and access to school-based health services (e.g., vision care, dental, medical care, and mental health counselors). A 2020 independent study showed that the city’s Community Schools have improved attendance and graduation rate, and New York City’s are seen as a model nationwide.

- **Launching a universal Baby Bonds program.** In 2016, the Administration launched a 529 Baby Bonds college savings pilot in Queens School District 30 in partnership with non-profit NYC Kids Rise (NYCKR). Children in this district now have more than \$6 million saved through the program that will go towards their college costs and career training. Building on the pilot, in 2021 the Administration expanded the program to all school districts – providing universal 529 savings accounts to every public school child, starting in Kindergarten. Every public dollar is estimated to leverage 15-20 times in philanthropy, family savings, community scholarships, and investment returns by the time a child graduates from high school. New York City is the first major city in the nation to implement this groundbreaking model for community wealth building.
- **Universal afterschool.** Through the Department of Youth and Community Development, the Administration created universal access to afterschool programs for middle school students, expanding enrichment experiences that bridge the opportunity gap during a critical period of child development. These programs also provide immediate support for parents who are able to join the workforce. This expansion also employed thousands of provider staff, many in high-need neighborhoods, increasing economic opportunity in these areas.
- **Expanding the CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP).** First launched in 2007, the CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) is a support program with a proven record of helping low-income students remain in school and obtain associate degrees. The Administration massively expanded CUNY ASAP from serving 4,000 students in 2014 to 25,000 students currently. The current three-year graduation rate for students enrolled in ASAP is 53% versus 24% for similar unenrolled students.

Building Career Skills and Experience

- **Transforming the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP):** The Administration transformed the decades-old SYEP, doubling the number of slots offered to young people over eight years while accounting for a much higher state minimum wage and raising investment in the program by nearly 190%. In the Summer of 2021, just under 75,000 young New Yorkers took part in the program – receiving invaluable on-the-job training, networking, and career skills.
- **Launching the Mayor's Office of Youth Employment.** In 2015, the de Blasio Administration created the Center for Youth Employment to expand, improve, and align programs and stakeholders that support young people toward career readiness. Since renamed the Mayor's Office of Youth Employment (MOYE), this team has convened system partners including DOE, CUNY, and DYCD to

develop holistic strategies such as CareerReady NYC and the reports of the City's Disconnected Youth Task Force. With its partners, MOYE has helped launch new initiatives that bridge education and career readiness such as Exploring Futures, a middle school career exploration initiative, and the reimagined Work Learn & Grow program that offers a for-credit CUNY course and a 200-hour paid internship to more than 2,200 high school students.

- **Investing in workforce training.** In 2014, the de Blasio Administration launched Career Pathways and Industry Partnerships – two programs with a focus on career development for New Yorkers, and creating feedback loops with employers. Within the first year of Career Pathways, the City nearly doubled its workforce training investment to \$54.3 million.
- **Creating the Public Health Corps.** In response to COVID-19, the Administration established the Public Health Corps (PHC) – an innovative effort to expand the public health workforce, strengthen communities, and promote health equity for the communities hit hardest by the pandemic. Led by the Health Department and NYC Health + Hospitals, staff will serve 20 priority neighborhoods and support more than 500 Community Health Workers, in addition to initiatives that have a citywide focus.
- **Creating the “Jails to Jobs” program.** In 2018, the Administration launched “Jails to Jobs” – a first-of-its-kind program in the nation that offers every person leaving a City jail access to important re-entry services, including help finding employment. The City invests \$20 million annually in this program.
- **Creating the City Cleanup Corps.** As New York City recovered from the COVID-19 crisis, the Administration created the City Cleanup Corps – a \$250 million, New Deal-style jobs program that has hired more than 10,000 New Yorkers to revitalize our parks, plazas, streets, and sidewalks.
- **Creating the Vaccine for All Corps.** In March 2021, as New York City recovered from COVID-19, Mayor de Blasio announced the Vaccine for All Corps, a civilian corps for jobseekers to join the City’s vaccination effort. Through the Corps, the City recruited New Yorkers to serve their communities, with a priority focus on residents in 33 hard-hit communities.
- **Centralizing the Parks Opportunity Program (POP).** The Administration has also deepened the City’s commitment to workforce development programs including POP, a program run through the Department of Parks & Recreation that hires applicants referred by HRA/DSS to clean and green parks, playgrounds, and other facilities citywide. Each of POP’s 4,000 annual workers enjoys hands-on training, a Career Coach, and access to an array of workforce resources, including

preparation for the high-school equivalency test and specialized workforce training courses. The Administration also centralized POP by creating a pipeline transitioning POP workers to permanent positions at NYCHA.

- **Connecting jobseekers to training and employment.** The Administration has created services including WorkingNYC to centralize City programs and resources that help New Yorkers access employment, job training, education, career exploration. Additionally, Career Discovery NYC is a centralized resource to assist New Yorkers with career discovery and training, featuring online, no-cost trainings that prepare New Yorkers with the necessary skills to pursue a pathway for an in-demand career path in the industrial, tech, and media sectors.

Economic Development

- **Launching the Industrial Action Plan.** In 2015, the Administration released a plan to allocate \$115 million in new investments to strengthen core industrial and manufacturing areas – creating quality, good-paying jobs for working New Yorkers that will continue to be here for years to come. The Industrial Action Plan also launched Futureworks NYC, a public-private partnership to spur development of 21st century manufacturing. The Administration invested \$115 million to develop 500,000 square feet of manufacturing space at the Brooklyn Army Terminal, \$140 million for 1 million square feet of space at Brooklyn Navy Yard, \$37 million for additional infrastructure in Sunset Park, and \$150 million to protect 3.2 million square feet in Hunts Point.
- **Expanding the Brooklyn Navy Yard.** In November 2014, the Administration announced a major investment to transform the Brooklyn Navy Yard’s Building 77 into a modern manufacturing facility generating 3,000 good-paying jobs.
- **Building equity through community hiring.** In August 2020, as the Administration built an equitable recovery from COVID-19, it agreed with the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York to set new terms for Project Labor Agreements – prioritizing hiring from equity-driven zip codes where 15% or more of the population lives below the poverty line or are NYCHA residents.
- **Fostering the NYC Tech Talent Pipeline.** Through industry partnerships like the NYC Tech Talent Pipeline, the Administration has engaged hundreds of employers, invested millions of dollars, and trained thousands of New Yorkers to prepare them for career-track jobs with good wages.
- **Launching the Community Parks program.** In 2014, the Administration launched the Community Parks Initiative, which redesigns and rebuilds neglected

community parks with a focus on high-density, low-income areas that have seen less than \$250,000 in investment over the past 20 years. Since launching in 2014, CPI has fully reimagined 67 parks. \$425 million in additional funding announced in 2021 will result in 10 new CPI sites per year for the next decade.

Small Business Support

- **Unprecedented support for our M/WBEs.** The de Blasio Administration has helped a record number of M/WBEs become certified over the course of the Administration, nearing 10,000 total certifications across the five boroughs. After setting a goal of awarding \$25 billion in contracts to M/WBEs by 2025, the City is already running ahead of schedule. And as we emerge from COVID-19, the Administration has doubled down on small business support: the Mayor's signing of Executive Order 59 expands the use of M/WBEs in COVID response work.
- **Launching “Small Business First” (SB1).** In 2017, the Administration launched SB1, a first-of-its-kind investment to reduce the regulatory burden on small businesses. The Administration also launched lease assistance and grant programs for small businesses to help them adjust to changing market conditions.

Health Care

- **Giving all New Yorkers access to primary care.** In 2019, the Administration launched NYC Care – a model for the nation that guarantees every New Yorker access to a primary care doctor through the City’s public health system. In 2020, NYC Care expanded to all five boroughs, and more than 96,000 New Yorkers have now enrolled in the program.
- **Building an equitable recovery agenda to the COVID-19 pandemic.** In the face of a global pandemic that exacerbated inequalities in our health care system, the Administration advanced a recovery for all New Yorkers. The City deployed rapid, safe, and inexpensive testing during the pandemic; opened a Vaccine Command Center that prioritized the hardest-hit communities; announced steps to make New York City a hub for public health research; and built COVID-19 Centers of Excellence to support neighborhoods reeling from the pandemic. All of these steps have not only protected lower-income New Yorkers during this crisis, but have set in motion a plan for a more equal New York City.
- **Delivering mental health for all.** The Administration has also addressed historic inequities in the area of mental health care – creating a 24/7 helpline called NYC Well where any New Yorker can receive free counseling, in 200+ languages; training community leaders in mental health first aid; and during the pandemic,

providing universal mental health check-ins at schools and vaccination sites to bring every New Yorker the care and support they need.

- **Launching proactive health insurance enrollment outreach.** In 2016, the Administration established the GetCoveredNYC (GCNYC) team to run direct, proactive multilingual outreach to identify uninsured New Yorkers and help enroll them in health insurance.

Affordable Housing & Tenant Protection

- **Creating an unprecedented number of affordable homes.** In 2014, the Administration launched Housing New York, with the goal of building or preserving 200,000 units of affordable homes throughout the five-boroughs by 2025. When it became clear we were ahead of schedule, the administration expanded our goal and has committed the funds and tools to build or preserve 300,000 affordable homes by 2026, with close to 50% of the housing reserved for low and extremely low-income families.
- **Protecting tenants.** In August 2017, Mayor de Blasio signed an historic new law giving every New York City tenant the right to counsel in eviction cases. In conjunction with the legislation, the Administration created a new Universal Access to Council Team (UATC) to conduct proactive outreach to tenants in housing court. By 2019, NYC had seen a 41% reduction in residential evictions compared to 2013. In 2019, the Administration deepened these efforts by creating the Mayor's Office to Protect Tenants which worked in partnership with the Mayor's Public Engagement Unit to create a one-stop free Tenant Helpline and a Tenant Resource Portal to help renters access free resources. Through the citywide implementation of the Right to Counsel program in 2020, every tenant with calendared eviction cases had access to legal services, and 71% of tenants who appeared in Housing Court had full representation by attorneys – nearly double the pre-pandemic rate of 38%, and an exponential increase over the 1% of tenants who had lawyers in 2013. Since 2014, the City has provided legal services to more than 500,000 New Yorkers, including approximately 100,000 New Yorkers who utilized this program during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Making affordable housing more accessible.** The Administration has driven changes to HPD's affordable housing lottery application to increase affordable housing access for the most vulnerable New Yorkers. The new guidelines offer renters the option to show positive rental history instead of submitting to credit checks, or provide their own credit checks, and allow for additional occupants per unit. The new policies reduce the chances of a tenant being denied a unit due to poor credit history, and allow applicants to apply for affordable housing without the need to provide a Social Security Number or an Individual Taxpayer

Identification Number for every adult in the household. In 2019, the Administration codified into law HPD's practice of requiring developers of rental housing over 40 units to set aside 15 percent of their new rental units for homeless New Yorkers. In 2021, the Administration also supported City Council legislation that prohibits landlords from using a criminal background check.

- **Rent Freezes.** Under this Administration, the Rent Guidelines Board approved three rent freezes and maintained low rent increases on the other years. These decisions were historic and monumental for the 2.3 million New Yorkers who live in rent stabilized homes.
- **Recruiting vacant units for voucher holders.** In 2015, Mayor de Blasio created the Home Support Unit within NYC's Office of Public Engagement Unit (PEU) to develop direct outreach campaigns to landlords, urging them to rent their vacant units to homeless veterans. In December of that year, New York City became the largest city in the country to be certified by the federal government for ending chronic veteran homelessness. Through continued efforts, New York City is now approaching "Functional Zero" — a national standard of housing homeless veterans within 90 days of entering the homeless system. PEU has since housed thousands of voucher holders in shelter into permanent homes.

Broadband for All

- **Developing an Internet Master Plan.** As demonstrated by the COVID-19 crisis, access to Broadband is one of the equity issues of our time – affecting a family's access to Telemedicine, remote learning, job opportunities, and more. In 2020, the City announced its Internet Master Plan to expand affordable Broadband service across the five boroughs. In October 2021, the City announced an investment of \$157 million to build publicly-owned, open-access Broadband infrastructure, supporting more than 1.5 million New Yorkers. Additionally, the Administration ensured every student enrolled had access to a remote learning device including distributing iPads and hotspots to assist with online learning during the pandemic.

2020 Census

- **Leading an historic count.** Ending inequality in our city also means ensuring our communities receive the investments they deserve from the federal government. In 2020, for the first time in New York City history, the City launched a massive Census outreach campaign, a \$40 million investment in grassroots outreach and media in 27 languages. New York City achieved an historic 62% response rate – well above that of Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia – resulting in more funding for public hospitals, infrastructure, and support for traditionally underserved neighborhoods.

Climate

- **Creating the NYC Green New Deal.** Our climate crisis is also an inequality crisis – with lower-income communities bearing the brunt of extreme weather events, air pollution, and the effects of climate change. In 2019, the Administration launched the \$14 billion NYC Green New Deal – a set of new and committed investments, as well as legislation, at the City level to ensure a 40% reduction in emissions by 2030. The investments of the NYC Green New Deal directly confront income inequality, generating tens of thousands of good-paying jobs retrofitting buildings and expanding renewable energy in the city.

This work is far from finished. Building a truly equal New York City – one in which all New Yorkers have a fair chance and equal opportunity – will not happen overnight, or even over eight years. Yet the progress of the de Blasio Administration shows fundamentally addressing income inequality is possible, urgent, and necessary. It is the only way to unlock and maximize the full potential of our city. Future administrations must continue to attack disparities with the full suite of tools available to them, and must call on the State and Federal governments to drive additional policies from the top-down to support working people. Our city and all New Yorkers depend on it.